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9 770308 589163 56>

THE MAN WHO PREDICTED SEPTEMBER 11
PAGE 16

WHO'S BEEN MURDERING SCIENTISTS?
PAGE 20

West Virginia, 1966: A small town invaded by UFOs, Men in Black, flying monsters... and paranoia

THE TRUE STORY BEHIND THE NEW HOLLYWOOD MOVIE

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES

24 PAGE SPECIAL

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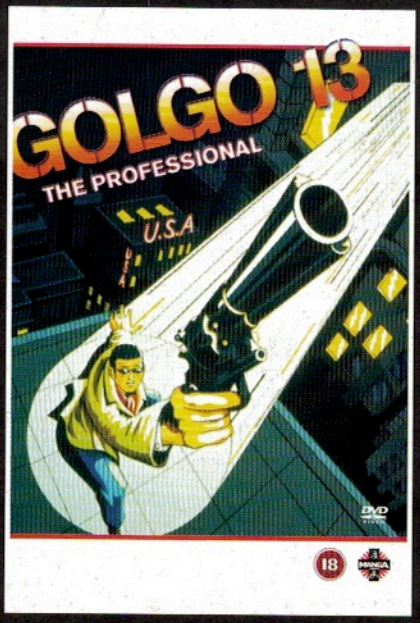

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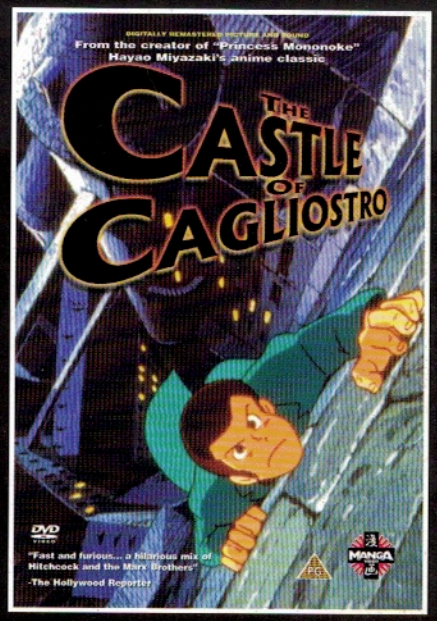
"one of the greatest orgies of battle and destruction ever seen in a live action film or an animated one... a feast for the eyes"

- Fantasia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contents 156

ALL THE LATEST NEWS ON WWW.FORTEANTIMES.COM

FORTEAN TIMES
THE JOURNAL OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES SPECIAL

26 THE MOTHMAN SPECIAL

BOB RICKARD introduces this special issue of Fortean Times with a look at Mark Pellington's new movie based on John Keel's classic book .

28 MOTHMAN COMETH

BOB RICKARD looks at the earliest sightings of the weird winged entity that spread terror through West Virginia.

29 POINT PLEASANT REVISITED

RICK MORAN recalls his 1978 visit to the town of Point Pleasant, centre of the outbreak of high strangeness recorded in *The Mothman Prophecies* .

33 JOHN A KEEL: A BIOGRAPHY

DOUG SKINNER presents a brief life of the author of *The Mothman Prophecies* .

34 LUNCH WITH KEEL

DOUG SKINNER along with George Kuchar and Mamie Caton, chews the fat with the man himself. Plus a bibliography of essential Keelian books.

36 INVASION OF THE DOLL PEOPLE

COLIN BENNETT muses on the links between Keel's strange creatures, political assassinations and the culture of mass entertainment.

39 KEEL VS UFOLOGY

JEROME CLARK assesses Keel's influence on ufology and his often prickly relationships with its central figures .

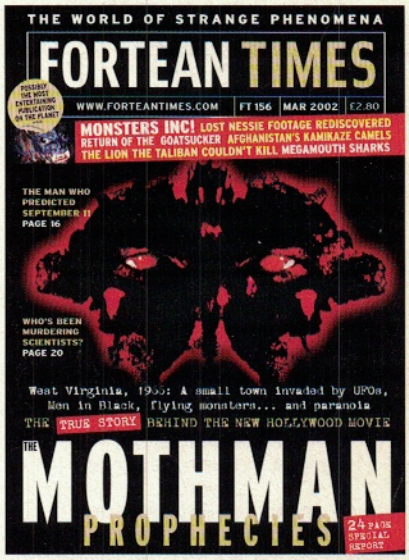
44 THE OWLING

TONY 'DOC' SHIELS remembers Max Ernst, the Owlman and weird times in Cornwall .

48 WELCOME TO MOTHMAN COUNTY

LOREN COLEMAN spends his New Year in Point Pleasant, retracing the steps of John Keel.

LOREN COLEMAN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West Virginia, 1966: A small town invaded by UFOs, Men in Black, flying monsters... and paranoia
THE TRUE STORY BEHIND THE NEW HOLLYWOOD MOVIE
THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES
24 PAGE SPECIAL REPORT

COVER IMAGE COURTESY OF HELKON SK

6 STRANGE DAYS

THIS MONTH: NESSIE FILM REDISCOVERED, CHUPACABRAS RETURNS, MICROBIOLOGISTS MEET STICKY END, PREDICTIVE BULLSEYES, TALES FROM AFGHANISTAN, MANCHESTER UNITED CURSE, KARL SHUKER'S ALIEN ZOO AND MORE.

REGULARS

4 EDITORIAL
19 SUBSCRIPTIONS
52 PHENOMENOMIX
54 LETTERS
59 REVIEWS
66 THE HIEROPHANT

READER INFORMATION

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Letters of comment or about experiences are welcome. We reserve the right to edit submissions.

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EDITORIAL

FLAPPING HELL!

MOTHMAN SPECIAL ISSUE

This issue we do something we have done only twice before in 28 years: we have given over most of the feature space to a single topic... in this case the 1966-67 series of frightening encounters with a dark and seemingly headless bat-winged apparition whose glowing red eyes dominated the unfortunate witnesses. These encounters – famously investigated by John Keel in his 1975 book *The Mothman Prophecies* – were never satisfactorily explained, but seemed to portend a tragic accident in which 46 people died.

Now, a new movie of the same title, by *Arlington Road* director Mark Pellington and based on Keel's seminal investigation, is in cinemas worldwide, providing us with a unique opportunity to reveal the truth behind the fiction. The Mothman case is important because it was the first to include multiple witnesses to UFOs, poltergeists, disembodied voices, harassment by Men in Black, mind control, astounding coincidences, a major catastrophe and close encounters with a truly alien entity. As part of our Mothman special, we present re-investigations of the goings-on in Point Pleasant by Rick Moran and Loren Coleman.

This special issue also provides the opportunity to pay tribute to John Keel as a pioneer whose writings have influenced several generations of forteans and ufologists. Doug Skinner, a colleague and neighbour of Keel's in New York, introduces us to Keel in person in a recent interview with him. Two critical articles by Colin Bennett and Jerry Clark provide context for Keel's theories and writing. Finally, our anthology would not be complete without the cartoon surrealism of Hunt Emerson.

FT SITE HACKED

For most of the second week in January, visitors to the *FT* Online site – forteantimes.com – were faced with a black screen with an offensive message. Clues to the perpetrator were cleverly ambiguous, but entering 'PoisonBox' into the Google search engine revealed that we were victims of a hacking war either against China or using the Yahoo servers in China. These people have proclaimed their ability to 'deface' any government website, anywhere, any time... and, somehow, our ISP (Shared Knowledge) was infiltrated by the 'defacement worm' at a time they were most vulnerable (they were off their guard, doing server maintenance). The worm used several different routes to redirect callers to sites carrying the defacement message and cleverly reinstalled itself after different attempts to remove it. We apologise for any offence and inconvenience this may have caused. All is back to normal now.

FT PLANS NEW SUPPLEMENTS

Our publisher – IFG Ltd – is considering the creation of two commercial supplements to the main magazine: one focusing on fortean DVD, CD and video material and the other chiefly on new and forthcoming books. We invite publishers, dealers, mail order companies and resellers (both large and small) to contact us for details on how to make the most of this marketing opportunity. Please get in touch with: Anthony White on 020 7687 7050 or by email at anthony.white @ifgmags.com or write to us at the usual address.

UNCON 2002

You can now order tickets for this year's weekend of the wondrous (6-7 April at The Commonwealth Institute) – see page 47 for details and an order form.

ERRATUM

FT155:51. We mistakenly stated that 'The Wizard of Ross' was David Levell's first piece for *FT* – in fact his feature 'China Syndrome' appeared back in ***FT123:28.***

BOB RICKARD PAUL SIEVEKING

COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'FORTEAN'?

FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort.

Throughout his life, Fort was sceptical about scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away (which is quite different from explaining a thing).

Fort, born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

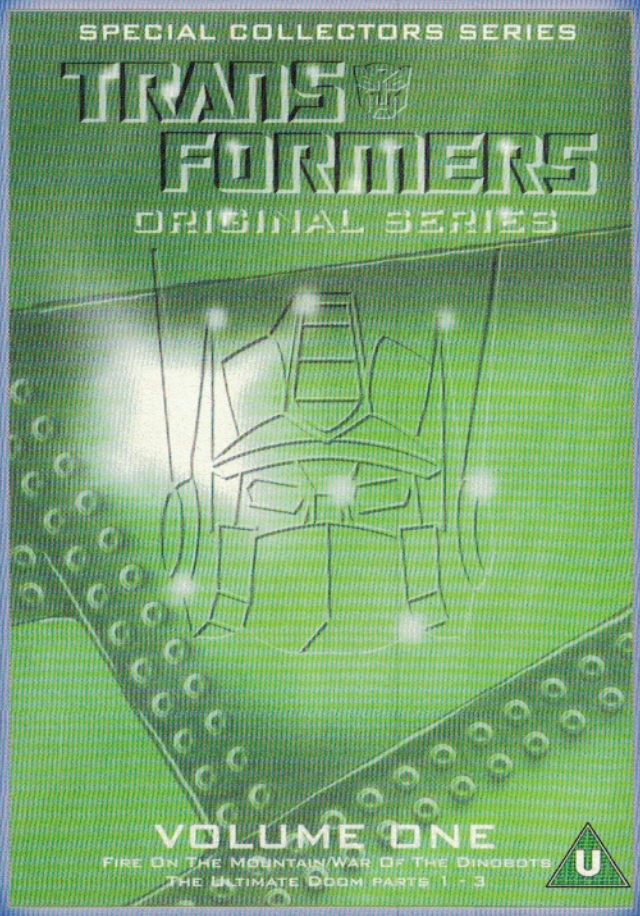
His dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate state between extremes. He had ideas of the universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena.

He coined the term 'teleportation' and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

CHARLES HOY FORT
(1874-1932)

HMV

robotsindisguise



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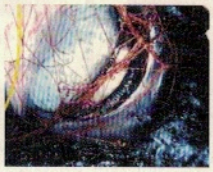
FETISH PARADE
Strange attractions
page 10

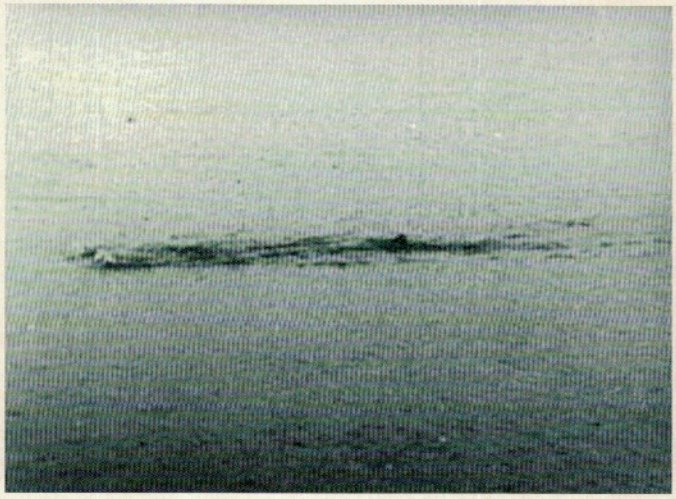


ALIEN ZOO
Megamouth landed
page 16

FOOTBALL CURSE
Blanc spells disaster
page 24

A MONSTER MOVIE

Vintage footage of Nessie is rediscovered nearly 70 years after it was first screened



ALL IMAGES BBC SCOTLAND

LONG-LOST 1936 FOOTAGE OF NESSIE – originally screened in cinemas as *The Loch Ness Monster – Proof at last!* – was shown on BBC on St Andrew's Day (30 November). Glasgow film-maker Malcolm Irvine's Scottish Film Productions Company archives were given to the Scottish Film Council when the company went bust in the late 1930s. The film canister joined about 20,000 others and slipped from sight. Most historians believed the film to have been destroyed and lost forever. In fact, it had survived in the SFC's basement (along with many other rusting cans of film) and had been passed on to Scottish Screen Archive, who came across it during cataloguing.

The film was Irvine's second of Nessie. His first was taken on 12 December 1933 near the salmon and trout feeding banks at Inverfarigaig, where the water was shallow. Irvine's camera jammed, so the film was only a few seconds long. The film was kept secret until 3 January 1934, when it was shown to a small audience. According to the following morning's *Times*, "The most clearly evident movements are of the tail or flukes. [..] Indeterminate movements in the water beside the monster suggests the action of something in the nature of fins or paddles."

MOST HISTORIANS BELIEVED THE FILM TO HAVE BEEN LOST FOR EVER

Irvine and his assistant returned to Inverfarigaig on 22 September 1936 and had the extraordinary (some might say suspiciously) good luck to spot and film Nessie again. Iain Mcmillan, one of the eyewitnesses who appear in the film, says: "We first saw its head and neck, then two humps one behind the other, and then something thrashing around behind from side to side, like a tail." The thing appeared to be about 30ft (10m) long, "almost black in colour and very shiny". The film was shown to the Linnæan Society, whose members could not explain what the thing was. According to Constance Whyte (author of *The Loch Ness Monster*, 1951), there is some suspicion of fraud: a mechanical device is said to have been used for some sequences.

Nessie brings over £120m into the local economy ("the only industry we have," according to Fraser Cameron of the Drumnadrochit Hotel). *In Search of Lake Monsters, Peter Costello (1974); Scotland on Sunday, 25 Nov; Independent, 27 Nov 2001.*

SCOTCH REELS: Witness Iain McMillan (left), and two other images from Irvine's 1936 film (top l/r).

CHUPACABRAS RIDES AGAIN

The goatsucker is back – unless it's just a winged kangaroo or a giant bat

RAMIRO PARRA GONZALEZ, a farmer outside the city of Bocoyna in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, heard the dogs which normally sleep in his fields begin to howl at midnight on 31 October. Shortly afterwards, he heard them running for their lives. The next morning he found 35 of his sheep dead, entirely drained of blood and with two small bite marks on their necks.

It was the third attack on sheep belonging to his family. On 10 October his brother, Francisco, returned to his fields after lunch to find the lifeless, bloodless bodies of 12 sheep and one pig; and on the morning of 25 October, another relative, Martin Parra Orpinel, found 16 of his sheep dead and another 14 gravely injured. All the animals had been bitten on the neck and exsanguinated. A local police spokesman said authorities were investigating the incidents.

Parra Gonzalez blamed the attacks on a mysterious vampire-like creature known as chupacabras, or the goatsucker. Similar livestock deaths in Chile in recent months have also been blamed on this creature. In late October, for instance, Ana Reyes Tapia of Viñas el Mar lost 29 chickens to something that had punched a hole in her henhouse fence over 3ft (90cm) from the ground.

At the end of August, taxi driver Mauricio Sanchez from Santiago told Chilean TV channel TVN about seeing a strange winged beast, about the size of a man, running alongside his car as he drove home at about 10.30 on a Friday night. It then overtook him and disappeared into the gloom. At first, he didn't want to publicise his strange vision, but his family persuaded him to tell the authorities. The Chilean press suggested that the "otherworldly beast" was the legendary goatsucker (not to be confused with the nightjar or whippoorwill, which is also called goatsucker).

In early November, the Chilean newspaper *Las Ultimas Notícias* reported rumours flying round the northern town of Huasco that a strange creature resembling a "kangaroo with wings" had been captured by a local miner, but had escaped and was hiding out in a coastal mine, where the police were keeping an eye on it.

Later that month, police and customs officers allegedly cornered the creature in a cave near the village of O'Higgins and the thermoelectric power plant of Guacolda. It appeared to be a giant bat. "According to descriptions, the creature was about 80 centimeters [2ft 7in] in height with a wingspan of about 1.7 metres [5ft 7in]", said Darwin Godoy, a local UFO and chupacabras investigator. Eyewitnesses included employees of the power plant and people living near the local cemetery.

[FT85:9; 89:34-38*, and many updates].*Reports from Owain Johnson, 31 Aug; La Estrella de Valparaiso (Chile), 19 Oct; [AP] 31 Oct; chupacabra@yahoogroups. com

CHUPACABRAS RIDES AGAINS AGAIN

Chupacabras first hit the headlines in Puerto Rico in March 1995, when dozens of small farm animals – goats, chickens and rabbits – were found exsanguinated, their blood drained through a single, small puncture wound. Similar attacks in the previous 20 years had been blamed on chupacabras, but few people apart from folklorists had paid them much attention. In the course of 1995, however, the mutilations reached epidemic proportions across the island, and the following year they spread to Mexico, San Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Brazil, and the Hispanic areas of Florida and Texas.

The first publicised sighting of chupacabras came in September 1995, when it was described a fanged, kangaroo-like entity with bulging red eyes. After that, sightings became commonplace. One witness said it had skin like that of a dinosaur and multicoloured spikes down its back; others claimed it was accompanied by "the strong smell of sulphur". Some suggested it had been summoned up by voodoo ritual; others saw it as a sinister genetic experiment by the government, a demonic creature heralding "the period of confusion" foretold in Revelation, or an extraterrestrial.

Descriptions varied so wildly that one journalist said it was "part reptile, part insect, part UFO". While officials routinely dismissed the reports – saying animals were being killed by wolves, dogs, coyotes, or vampire bats – chupacabras spawned folk songs, T-shirts, restaurants and a welter of knick-knacks. The Texas border town of Zapata inaugurated a chupacabras festival every August.

Not since the advent of crop circles had a strange phenomenon been so quickly assimilated into popular culture – although it has not spread to the English-speaking world. Chupacabras is now equal to the Loch Ness Monster or Bigfoot as a cultural icon.

EXTRA EXTRA

HEADLINES FROM NEWSPAPERS AROUND THE WORLD

HOOKER SET TO PULL THE PLUG ON FRANCE
Guardian, 15 Mar 2001.

MEXICAN RANCHERS FEAR TINY VAMPIRES
Houston (TX) Chronicle, 16 Mar 2001.

THOUSANDS FLOCK TO EDEN
News of the World, 18 Mar 2001.

CITY OF CORK STUCK IN WALES
Sunday Independent (Ireland), 18 Mar 2001.

WOMAN WHO IS ALLERGIC TO LIFE TELLS OF PRIVATE HELL
Aberdeen Press & Journal, 19 Mar 2001.

30FT FLASHING CLOWN IS THE LAST RESORT
Daily Express, 21 Mar 2001.

GUARDIAN ANGEL RESCUES VICTIMS OF KUMBH MELA
Independent, 26 Mar 2001.

TOWN BEING 'HELD TO RANSOM' BY BADGERS
(Hants & Dorset) Avon Advertiser, 28 Mar 2001.

BODY ASKED TO PAY FOR PROBE
Melbourne Age, 29 Mar 2001.

WEEDS WINNING BATTLE FOR SPACE
Financial Times, 30 Mar 2001.

COUNCIL CLIPS ANGEL'S WINGS
Warminster (Wilts) Journal, 30 Mar 2001.

DEAD MAN WINS SACKING CASE
Times, 30 Mar 2001.

CANADIANS GET HELPING HAND DURING SPERM CRISIS
Sunday Herald, –April 2001.

NEW GLASGOW GHOST PUPIL CLAIMS
Scotsman, 3 April 2001.

STRAW TURNS TO GOLD
New Zealand News (UK), 4 April 2001.

GERMAN GNOMES PUT OUT TO GRASS
Guardian, 4 April 2001.

CHRIST WAS WRONGLY CONVICTED, RULES SPANISH JUDGE
D.Telegraph, 5 April 2001.

GROUNDHOG XMAS: Andy Park, a 42-year-old singer from Melksham, Wiltshire, has celebrated Christmas every day since October 1991. He has turkey and all the trimmings next to a decorated tree, and watches a video of the latest Queen's speech. He now weighs 19st (120kg) and his doctor has warned him his life is at risk. He is also facing bankruptcy, having spent £100,000 on his obsession. *Guardian, 7 Nov; Sun, D.Telegraph, 26 Dec 2001.*

FESTIVE CRIME: A mystery Santa broke into a nursery in Hamburg and left behind presents and sweets for all 181 children. Police rushed to the scene after an alarm was set off, and several witnesses reported seeing a man in red running away. *Sunday Mercury, 23 Dec 2001.*

MESMERISED: The most watched television show in New York during Christmas week was a two-hour programme on Christmas Day of a yule log burning in a fireplace. It attracted more than 610,000 viewers. *Sunday Telegraph, 30 Dec 2001.*

DUCK RAIN: About half a minute after lightning struck near mechanics working at White's Mobile Home Supply in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in early December, dead ducks rained from the sky. They collected 20 mallards. The next day some still remained on the roofs of nearby homes. Lightning can hit ducks, said a biologist, but it is rare. *[AP] 8 Dec 2001.*

ALL ABOARD: From East London Newspapers TV guide last December: "I Love Christmas. Featuring clips from film classics such as *The Snowman* and *Chitty Chitty Gang Bang*."

PHANTOM IN FLAMES: For decades, a ghostly apparition of a woman in 19th century dress is said to have appeared as a passenger of vehicles crossing the covered bridge in Johnville, western New Brunswick, Canada. A photograph taken by a government employee as the bridge burnt down last spring is said to show the tormented face of a woman in the flames. *(Toronto) National Post, 3 Aug 2001.*

HIDEOUS KINKINESS

Our fetishists on parade include lovers of hair, feet and spectacles

JOVEN KEREKES

Four well-heeled women complained to police in Pittsburgh about a middle-aged man shoe fetishist. One woman said the man complimented her footwear as she entered an office lift on 6 September 2001 and asked if he could take a shoe. When she refused, he bent down and removed it anyway, then sniffed it "like it was a bouquet of flowers". The same day, Patty Cohen, 42, said a man kicked the back of her heel and knocked off her shoe on the street. After apologising, he grabbed her shoe and smelled it. When she grabbed it back, the man smiled and left. A man of a similar description accosted one woman in mid-August and another in June. *[AP] 9 Sept 2001.*

LUST

A Berlin court jailed a married 27-year-old bisexual man for stealing elderly men's specs. He generally stole them while under the influence of drugs, and used them to get aroused with his boyfriend. Another (or possibly the same) Berlin man had developed his specs fetish after his optician told him he had poor eyesight. His wife said that newly-nicked glasses turned him on. *News of the World, 4 Feb; Queensland Times, 13 Mar 2001.*

THIS LITTLE PIGGY...

Missouri police are looking for a foot fetishist who tells women that his wife has sent him out to buy tights, asks them about their choice of pantyhose and, when they remove their shoes, gives their tootsies a damn good suck. His patter never varies, according to the police, and he seems to pick on women in hotels. *St Louis Post-Dispatch, 13 Oct; Metro, 16 Oct 2000.*

DEMON BARBER

A 38-year-old woman from West Lothian, Scotland, was grabbed by a Scot in his 30s who announced that he didn't like her hairstyle, pushed her against a fence, shouted abuse at her and chopped her ponytail off. She kneed him in the nuts before going for help.

Edinburgh forensic psychologist Dr Keith Ashcroft says the man probably has a hair fetish, and might have stolen the hair because he was misogynist, took part in sadistic rituals, had a brain disorder which lowered his arousal threshold, was a kleptomaniac or possibly a transvestite... The police thought he might have struck more than once and that his attacks might become more violent. *Scotsman, 1 Feb; Edinburgh Eve. News, 1 Feb, 15 Mar; D.Mail, 2 Feb 2001.*

MEET THE WIFE

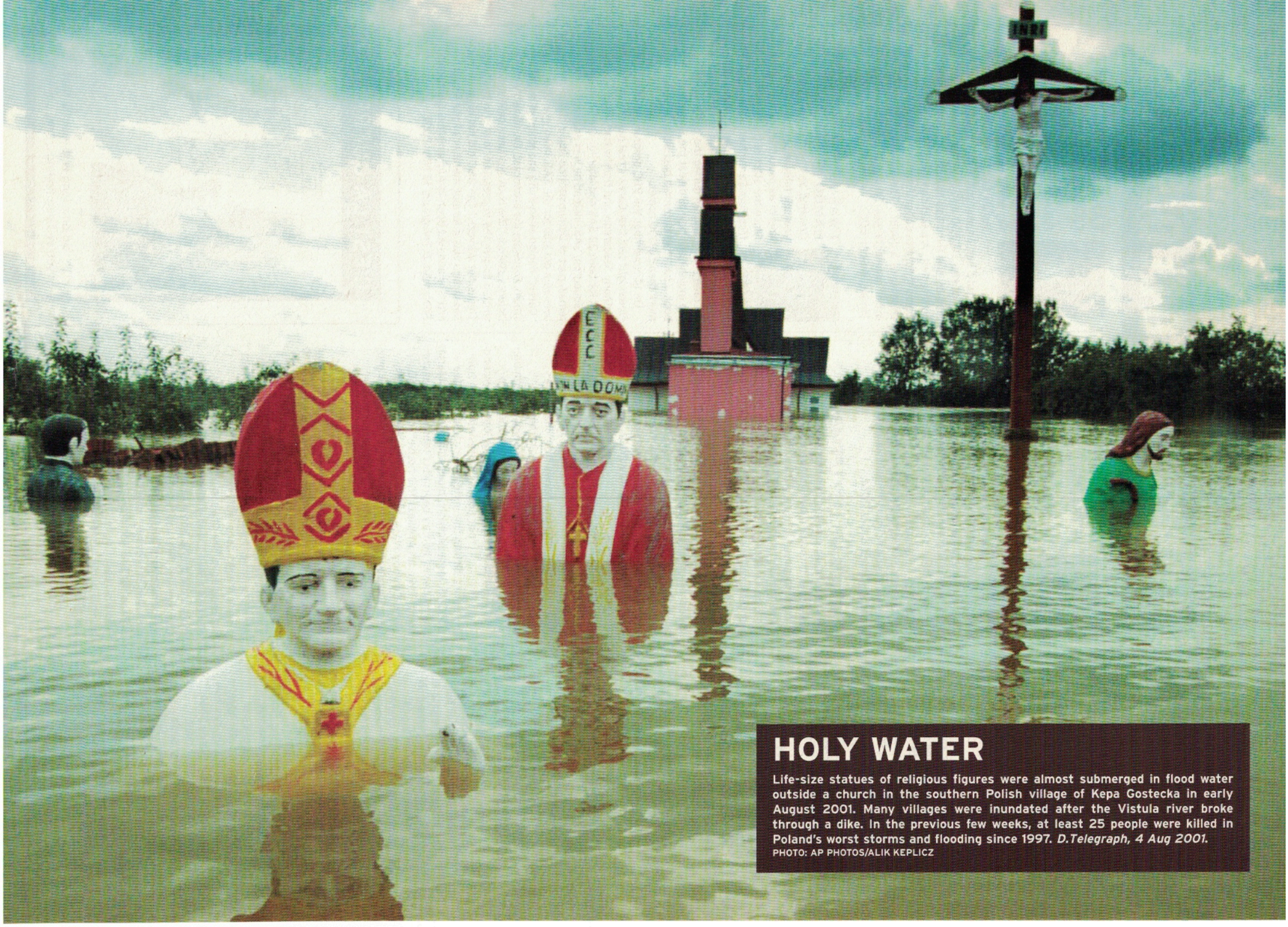
The following tales *sound* like variations on an urban legend, but *FT* would like to point out (yet again) that this doesn't mean that some of them didn't actually happen. Folklorists use the term ostension when such legends are acted out and become genuine news.

A man in his fifties, from the northern Italian town of Trento, called a chatline on 8 January with the promise of erotic conversation with a "hot housewife". He was put through to his own wife who was driven to the chat firm because she was bored with their sex life, according to the newspaper *La Repubblica. Sunday Express, 9 Jan 2001.*

A Chinese man who had been flirting for a month with a woman known as I Want You on an internet chat website called "The Green, Green Schoolyard" arranged to meet his cyber-lover on a street in Beijing, with both of them carrying a certain newspaper to identify themselves. His virtual object of desire turned out to be his wife, who also thought she was about to meet a new love. The ensuing brawl was so fierce that passers-by alerted security guards who had to separate the two, according to Norway's main news agency NTB. *Ananova, 18 July 2001.*

A 37-year-old man seeking sexual gratification in the red light district of the German town of Aachen in the small hours of Saturday morning, 23 June, was surprised to encounter his wife who, unknown to him, was working as a prostitute. Police were called to calm a row between the couple. *[R] 26 June 2001.*

A month after his divorce came through, Imre Szekely of Prague registered with a computer dating agency. He was sent details of "the woman you will be happiest with... your partner in a million." It was his ex-wife, Jena. *Sunday Mail, 26 Aug; Guardian, 29 Aug 2001. For earlier variations on this theme, see* **FT58:17, 66:15.**



HOLY WATER

Life-size statues of religious figures were almost submerged in flood water outside a church in the southern Polish village of Kepa Gostecka in early August 2001. Many villages were inundated after the Vistula river broke through a dike. In the previous few weeks, at least 25 people were killed in Poland's worst storms and flooding since 1997. ***D.Telegraph, 4 Aug 2001.***

PHOTO: AP PHOTOS/ALIK KEPLICZ

SIDELINES

A BOAR WITH TASTE: Last December, a wild boar was wrecking the crops of a farmer in Trier in Germany. Threatened with ruin, he resorted to playing Britney Spears songs repeatedly at top volume from a loudspeaker hidden in the maize stalks. The boar took off and never returned. *Guardian, 29 Dec 2001.*

DOGS BESIEGE CHURCH: Following evening service at St Philip's and St James' Church, Leckhampton, Gloucestershire, on 18 November, during which the Rev Peter Chicken gave a sermon mentioning Daniel in the lions' den, the congregation of 40 found their way barred by a rottweiler and a mastiff. They were rescued by police who hauled the dogs back to their owner's home nearby. The beasts were trained to recognise only 20 people and bite anyone else. *D.Telegraph, Sun, 20 Nov 2001.*

RESERVE STRENGTH: A "superhuman effort" by a workmate freed a tree-lopper trapped under an 800kg (1,764lb) tree that fell on him in Melbourne, Australia, on 11 October. The 30-year-old man was lucky to be alive after the 4m (13ft) tree fell the wrong way and trapped his legs, causing extensive injuries. *Sydney Morning Herald, 11 Oct 2001.*

A FOOL MOON: Theresa Masinos, 48, of Carversville, Pennsylvania, bared her buttocks to passing motorists in Lambertville, New Jersey, on 2 October while trying to hitch a lift after her grandmother told her to "bare your posterior and yell 'fill 'er up!' three times" if she wanted to avoid debts. She was charged with lewd behaviour. *[AP] 12 Oct 2001.*

SUMER SPECIAL: The Finnish musician Jukka Ammondt, whose recordings of Elvis Presley songs in Latin have achieved cult status, has now released "Blue Suede Shoes" translated into ancient Sumerian by Prof Simo Parpola. The song's refrain becomes: "Nig-na-me si-ib-ak-ke-en, e-sir-kus-za-gin-gu ba-ra-tag-ge-en". *Lenta Ru (Belarus), Irish Times, 3 July 2001.*

FORTEAN FOLLOWUPS

LYNX ON THE LOOSE [*FT148:18*]

The young female European lynx caught in Cricklewood, north London, last May is now said to be "enjoying life" in London Zoo's big cat enclosure. Ray Charter, head keeper of the big cats, said: "We've called her Lara and she's the only lynx in the big cat enclosure here so we will not be breeding her. When she came here she had a broken paw and that's better now. She was also quite thin but she's gained more weight and has settled in well." Where Lara came from remains a mystery. *Hendon Times, 3 Oct 2001.*

WHERE'S WILLIE? [*FT148:23*]

The belief that penises can mysteriously disappear through a handshake or an incantation is commonplace in West Africa. Between 24 and 27 November, there were 10 attacks resulting from penis-stealing panics in Cotonou, the commercial capital of Benin. Five people died – four burned and one hacked to death. These attacks begin with someone screaming that that he has been robbed of his penis. An angry mob then descends on any passer-by deemed to look suspicious, strips them naked and douses them in petrol before setting them alight. No-one bothers to ask whether or not the accused possesses magical powers. *[AP] 27 Nov 2001.*

CANNIBAL COOKOFF [*FT150:7*]

Human bones from many pre-Columbian sites in the US Southwest show signs of cannibalism – percussion marks, burn traces, splitting of long bones and "pot polish" (abrasions from boiling bones hitting the inside of a cauldron). See ***FT113:16***. Most recently, biochemist Richard Marlar has analysed human coprolites (desiccated excrement) from an Anasazi "pit-house", c.AD 1150, along Cowboy Wash, a dry stream bed in southwest Colorado. He found human myoglobin, a protein found only in skeletal and heart muscles, apparently proving that human flesh had been eaten. *Los Angeles Times, Guardian, 7 Sept; Int. Herald Tribune, 8 Sept; Economist, 9 Sept; Times, 14 Sept 2000; Ogden (UT) Standard-Examiner, 10 June 2001.*

CHILE DOG BOY [*FT150:9*]

Alex, the 11-year-old boy removed last June from a pack of wild dogs with whom he had been scavenging in the Chilean port of Talcahuano, climbed a wall in early November and escaped from a children's home in the southern city of Concepción. "He was responding well to psychiatric treatment and his relations with other people were improving," said Miriam Olate, a spokeswoman for the National Children's Service. The Reuters report called him Axel, aged 10, but said his real name could not be revealed under Chilean law. *[R] 14 Nov 2001.*

FAKE ANTIQUITIES [*FT152:12*]

Following the suggestion that many supposed Near Eastern antiquities in museums round the world are modern fakes, Peru's Consumer Defence Institute has announced that a significant number of the 20,000 ancient gold objects assembled by the Peruvian Museum of Gold may be counterfeit. A panel concluded that 4,257 items from the collection were "false without a shadow of a doubt". The authenticity of 92 other artefacts was "in doubt". *Queensland Times, 4 Sept 2001.*

I WAS A TEENAGE RAMBO [*FT153:17*]

Creating an imaginary past for yourself falls under the syndrome known as *pseudologica fantastica*. Since the start of the Afghan conflict, Tom Carew has written articles for several newspapers about his exploits with the SAS (Special Air Services) and his time in Afghanistan during the 1980s teaching the mujahideen how to defeat the Soviet army. His book *Jihad!* had become a best-seller, shifting more than 30,000 copies.

On 14 November the BBC programme *Newsnight* said that Carew's real name was Philip Anthony Sessarego, and that he had failed selection for both 22 SAS and later for the TA Reserve, R Squadron, SAS. Instead he was allowed to remain part of Demonstration Troop of non-members who did jobs for the SAS. In an interview, "Carew" denied everything and stormed out of the studio. Following the broadcast, the Ministry of Defence stated: "The book has been deliberately written to give the impression he was in the SAS. This is not correct." The BBC did not dispute that Sessarego was a former member of the Royal artillery and had been in Afghanistan. *Guardian, Scotsman, D.Telegraph, 15 Nov 2001.*

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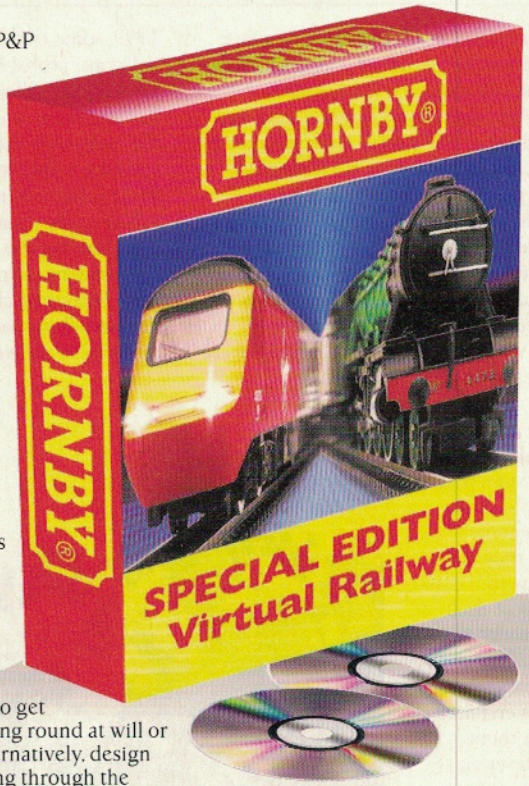

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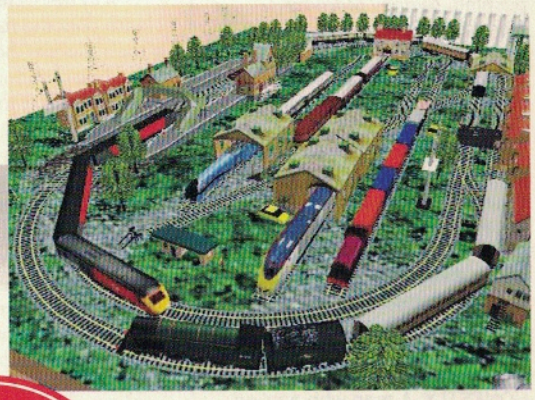

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SIDELINES

MUSICAL PANTS: Carlos Avila, flying in from Havana, was arrested in Miami airport after customs officials found 44 songbirds, including Cuban melodious finches, hidden in his trousers. If convicted of unlawful importation, he could face five years in jail. ***Edinburgh Eve. News, 15 Nov; Sun, 16 Nov 2001.***

LOGIC BYPASS: Police in New Zealand rushed to an inner-city telephone box after a panic-stricken call from a man who said he could not get out. He was freed moments later when police arrived and pulled open the door. The man inside had been pulling instead of pushing. *Sydney Morning Herald, 18 Sept 2001.*

CAVERN IS A GAS: When management at the Peak Cavern near Castleton, Derbyshire, reverted to the name used in Anglo-Saxon times, the Devil's Arse – because of the farting noise made when accumulated water drains away – visitor numbers jumped by more than 30 per cent. ***Guardian, 27 Aug 2001.***

HONESTLY: A man who applied for a job as a police officer in Baltimore was a few tracks short of an album. When asked on the job application form whether he had ever committed a crime, Edwin Gaynor, 21, checked the box marked Yes. He told officers he had car-jacked a woman and robbed five people in Killeen, Texas. He was promptly arrested. *Dayton (OH) Daily News, 4 Sept 2001.*

VEGGIE COMMANDOS: Two men scaled the outer walls of a prison in Arad, Romania, attacked a guard who disturbed them, and made off with a sack containing 88lb (40kg) of cabbages. They were arrested shortly afterwards and will probably spend time in Arad jail. *Metro, 16 Oct 2001.*

BOILED FISH: More than 2,000 tonnes of dead fish were washed ashore in Kuwait during late August and early September. The deaths were a mystery, although some experts blamed a heat-wave that warmed the sea to 36°C (97°F). *[R] 23 Sept; Independent, 13 Sept 2001.*

AFRICAN WITCH HUNTS

Times have been tough for 'witches' in Congo, Ghana and Tanzania

The Uganda-controlled north-eastern Congolese province of Ituri was the centre of a violent witch-hunt in late June. According to a Ugandan commander in Aru, quoted in Uganda's state-run *New Vision* newspaper, 843 people were murdered by their fellow citizens because of their supposed involvement in witchcraft; the toll may be 2,000–4,000. The deaths of thousands of children have been blamed on "night dancers"; but drugs to treat endemic diseases – including measles, meningitis, cholera and even the plague – have been unavailable since the start of the war in the Congo, and the majority of the dead children were found to be anæmic and malnourished.

Witches were credited with dancing naked around their victims' houses, and stealing children's blood and storing it in underground cisterns; they also smeared houses with a contact toxin as part of their plan to rid the world of non-witches by 2006. Their houses were easy to spot: hellish fires engulfed but did not burn them. Bush courts were set up – merely having an onion, the devil's vegetable, was proof of guilt – and soon developed into a pogrom of the wealthier 'witches', whose goods were redistributed.

BETTMANN/CORBIS

The war in Congo started in August 1998, when Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi invaded Congo in support of Congolese rebels; they claimed that Laurent Kabila's government was sheltering groups opposed to the Rwandan and Ugandan governments. Up to three million people may have died as a result of the war; at least 2,500 people are dying daily, according to the International Rescue Committee. Congo has most of the world's deposits of coltan, a source of the tantalum which is a vital ingredient for mobile phones and computer chips.

Kabila integrated the pro-government Mai Mai, a loose grouping of Congolese defence forces, into the Congolese Armed Forces in 1999. The Mai Mai (whose name comes from the Swahili word for water, *maji*) are made up of 'autocthone' (original) tribes with a traditional enmity for Tutsis and Hutus and a dislike of the Congolese people of Rwandan origin. The marijuana-smoking and banana beer-swigging Mai-Mai are heavily influenced by witchcraft; they wear *gri-gri* (charm) necklaces – often made of bathroom fixtures – into battle and sprinkle themselves with water to render themselves immune to bullets. They also believe they are invisible in battle.

When the Mai-Mai moved into the Mwenga area, Rwandan-backed rebel soldiers allied to the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), were sent to occupy the township. When, in December 1999, some of the RCD soldiers' wives became delirious, probably from malaria, the soldiers accused the villagers of casting spells on their families and went on a killing spree. The chief fled into the bush with the local Mai-Mai, leaving his wife with the village's protective fetish. When the RCD soldiers buried his wife alive in front of the villagers, they made sure everyone saw that they were burying the charm with her. (The Rwandan government claimed that three women, not 15, were beaten by civilians, not RCD troops.) Amnesty International has stressed that the vast majority of the victims of killings, torture and arbitrary arrest by the RCD and Mai-Mai were non-combatants.

Liverpool Echo, 19 May; [AP] 5 July; The Scotsman, 13 July; D.Telegraph, 28 July, 9 Aug 2001; http://news.24.com/; www.nationalpost.com/; www.hartford-hwp.com; Amnesty International.

Eighty-year-old Janet Tibu is suing the elders of her village for branding her a witch. The Ghanaian woman was found guilty of ruining a herb doctor's crops and reputation, and her children were banned from seeing her. Tibu's case is a first in the country. Though Ghana has a modern constitution, hundreds of 'witches' (and unmarried mothers) have been banished to, and forced to labour in, isolated *soba fonfu* or *kukuo* (home of witches) villages.

Over 5,000 women live in camps in northern Ghana and fear they will be murdered if they leave. An attempt to close a camp in Gambaga (after 'exorcism' rites and the payment of 'accommodation' fees) failed when an outbreak of meningitis was blamed on the women.

The government is also trying to crush *Trokosi*, a system whereby female children are made slaves of a fetish shrine to atone for offences allegedly committed by members of their families. The girls become the property of the fetish priest and have to work for him. If a fetish slave dies, the family is expected to replace her with another young girl. Nearly 1,000 slaves were freed by mid-2000, but at least 2,200 remain. ***LA Times, 24 Dec 2000; Voice, 16 April 2001, Home Office reports.***

Tanzanian health officials are desperately fighting trachoma, a disease which causes up to 80 per cent of blindness in the developing world and is exacerbated by poor hygiene. Bloodshot eyes are symptomatic of trachoma and, in the northern district of Shinyanga, a sign of witchcraft. Officials hope that if they defeat trachoma, fewer women will be lynched… *www.misanet.com / 2 Aug 2001.*

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FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

Some ancient equinities to complement the modern ones in ***FT149:16***.

Fort – no hippophile, he – has only (*Books*, p89) a sceptical mention of the horse carried away Dorothy-style by a Wisconsin tornado on 23 May 1878. This actually happened to many animals here at Sylvan Lake, Alberta, in July 2000.

The *FT* piece calls rare the Russian equine cemetery at Tsarskoye Selo. Ancient steeds were routinely buried from the Bronze Age on. Of especial Russian relevance are the Scythian interments at royal funerals described by Herodotus (*Histories*, bk4 chs71–3) and Lucian (*On Funerals*, ch14), confirmed by modern archæology, e.g. DC Kurz & J Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1971, p319). Herodotus also (bk6 ch101) mentions the burial at Athens opposite their driver Cleon of the mares that won him three Olympic chariot races. Pliny (*Natural History*, bk8 ch64 para155) says "a great number of horses' graves at Agrigentum have pyramids over them," also that Augustus' grand mound for one inspired a poem by prince Germanicus. Various horse bones turned up at the second-century AD Roman cavalry fort at Newstead; cf. JK Anderson, *Ancient Greek Horsemanship* (Univ. California, Berkeley-LA, 1967, p25).

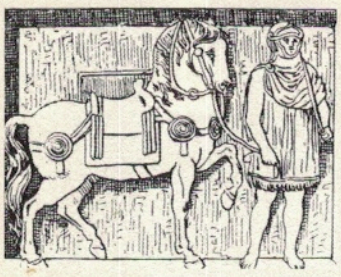
In Homer's *Iliad* (bk19 vv403–23), Achilles' horse Xanthos suddenly prophesies his master's impending death. A suggestive poetic conceit: in Julius Obsequens' *Book of Prodigies* (culled from Livy), horses don't speak, cows/dogs/oxen being the loquacious ones; cf. Fort (pp862–70) for the chattering canine classes.

Herodotus (bk5 ch1) without any details – confound him! – says the Pæonians and Perinthians settled their war with three simultaneous duels: man v. man, dog v. dog, horse v. horse.

Less familiar than Alexander's Bucephalus is Julius Caesar's horse, described by Suetonius (*Life of JC*, ch61) as "remarkable, with almost human feet, its hooves cloven like toes." Caesar tamed and alone could ride this beast (soothsayers declared it presaged his future power), marking its demise with a temple.

In unlucky contrast, the horse of Seius became proverbial after its four successive owners all died violently – Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights*, bk3 ch9.

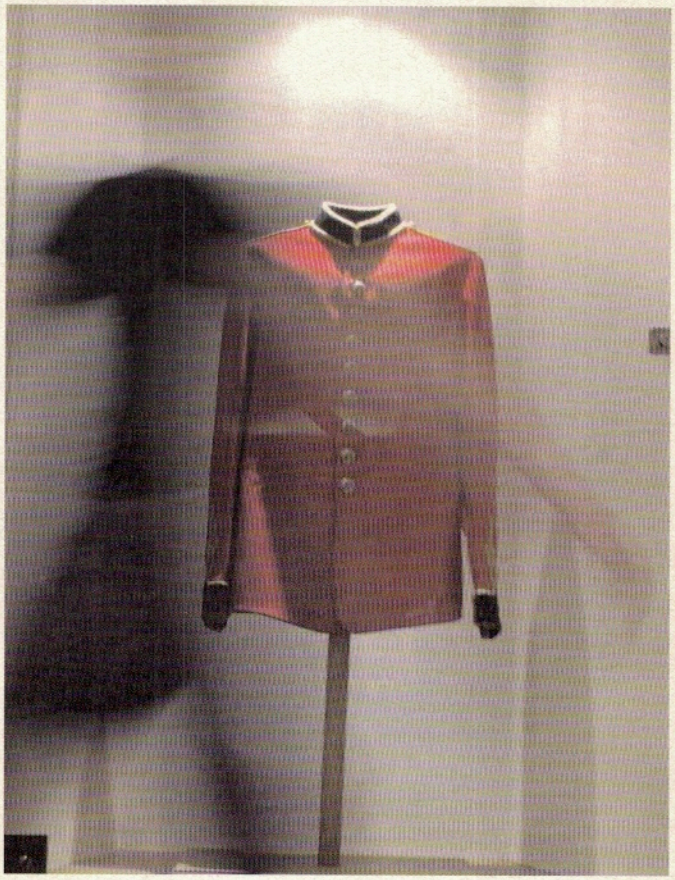
Pliny (bk8 ch64 paras154–66) and Aelian (*On Animals*, also *Historical Miscellany*) have repertories of horse stories. Both reproduce Aristotle's (*History of Animals*, ch545 para 20) 75-year-old mare; the modern longevity record in D Walleschinsky/ A&I Irving, *Book of Lists I* (Bantam, NY, 1977, p133) is 46. King Antiochus Soter (280–261 BC) was avenged by his horse which killed the Gaul who'd killed him. The Olympic mare Aura, having thrown her rider Phidolas at the start, carried on racing, came in first, realised she'd won, and pulled up, whereupon the judges awarded Phidolas the prize – has this ever happened at Aintree or Epsom? Rather differently Disneyesque was the horse so enamoured of its boy-owner Socles that it tried to rape him, and when promptly sold, committed suicide by self-starvation.



Rome was horse-mad (Lucian, *Nigrinus*, ch29). Less so the Byzantines, who replaced the classical term 'Hippos' by the modern 'Alogo' (Stupid Thing; the feminine form also means Ugly Woman), a semantic shift unlikely to engender good horse stories. Not so in the West, suitably, since Græco-Roman superstition credited West Winds with impregnating mares. Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240), *Exempla*, ch38, has one with an understanding of prayers and a moral sense. Pepys (*Diaries*, 1 Sept 1668) was much impressed by a horse that could count money and which "did come to me, when she was bid to go to him of the company that most lov'd a pretty wench in a corner" – it got the famously randy Pepys bang to rights! Had this equine any descent from Banks' bay, Morocco, whose similar tricks also included money-counting, advertised in Shakespeare's *Love's Labours Lost* (1.2.53–7); cf. Wallechinsky & Co., *Lists 2* (Bantam, NY, 1980, p105) for other similarly smart steeds.

SPOOKY TUNIC

The sartorial spectre of Edinburgh Castle



LUCIE HUSBAND

A 19TH CENTURY ROYAL ENGINEER'S TUNIC, BOUGHT from a second-hand shop in Edinburgh's Grassmarket two years ago, has caused a stir in Edinburgh Castle's restaurant, where it forms part of an exhibition about the history of the castle's One O'clock Gun. The catering staff have been spooked after one of them saw the jacket's arm moving, as if it were being worn by a soldier beating a drum. Although the tunic is displayed in a glass case, making it impossible for it to have been caught in the wind, the caterer saw the arm of the tunic move up and down three times.

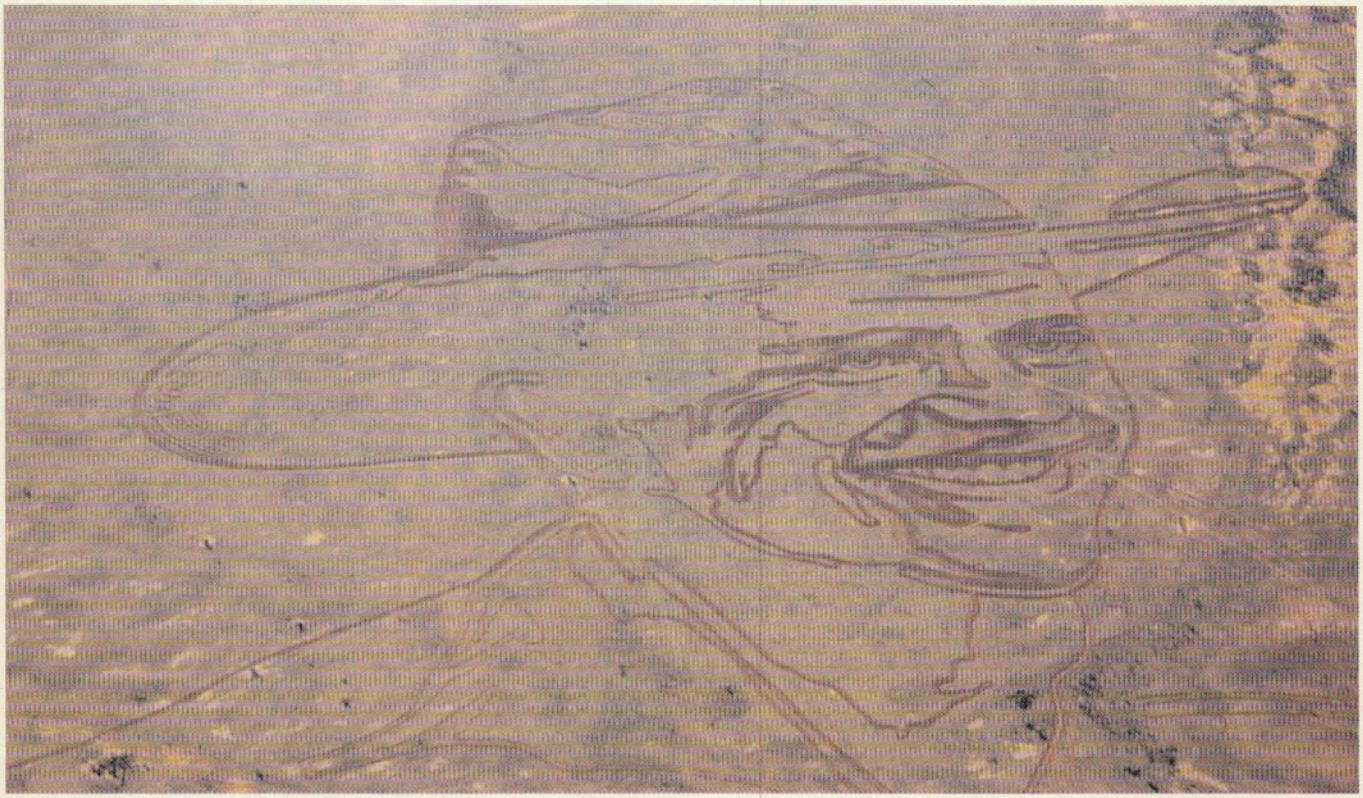
The tunic represents Colour Sergeant Donald MacNab Scott, who befriended Greyfriars Bobby, the dog famous for the epic vigil on his master's grave [***FT127:21***]. The Royal Engineer trained the homeless dog to come to him for his dinner when the gun fired at one o'clock.

There are possible links to another Castle spook. "There have been reports of the spectre of a headless drummer at the Castle since 1650," said Robin Mitchell, who runs Edinburgh's Witchery Tours. "It dates back to a time when a sentry on duty heard the slow beat of a drum one night. He called out, but received no answer, so shot at the drummer with his musket. The drumming stopped, but when he went to investigate there was no body. Over the next few nights other sentries heard the drumming and then Colonel Walter Dundas, who was in charge of the troops, heard it too and took it to be a warning of impending war. Sure enough, the Castle was soon surrounded by Cromwell's forces and fell to the English."

Subsequent sightings of the drummer, often headless, have been made in the Castle itself and in the vaults (where Richard Wiseman conducted a ghost investigation recently – see ***FT147:6***). With Britain at war in Afghanistan, did the moving tunic signal the return of the ghostly drummer? *Edinburgh Eve. News, 14 Nov 2001.*

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

Outback artist creates the world's largest portrait with teeth the size of football grounds



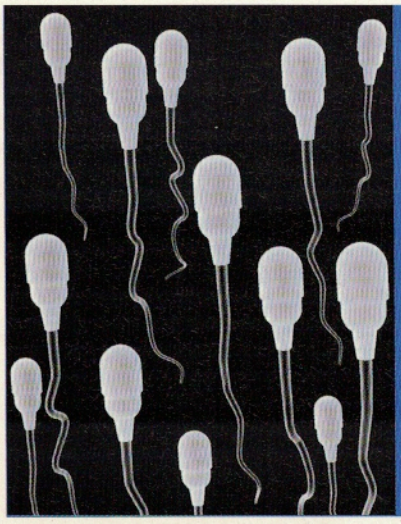
AFP

PETER ANDREW ANDERSON HAS created the world's largest artwork, the head and shoulders of a smiling stockman covering 4.3 million square metres (46.3 million sq ft), furrowed into the Mundi Mundi Plains, at Eldee Farm north of Broken Hill, New South Wales. He took a year to chisel out the image with a tractor, exposing the red earth. It is larger than Marree Man, the 2 mile (3.2km)-long figure of an aboriginal hunter which appeared in the South Australian desert three years ago [*FT115:6*].

Anderson, who paints under the name of Ando, created Eldee Man from a sketch without using navigational satellite aids. His partner, Christine Righetti, said they waited until the drawing was completed before taking a flight to check it was to scale. "Ando has a wonderful visualisation technique... he is able to imagine himself above the painting," she said. "When he saw it, his comment was, 'Oh great, it's not a Picasso'."

The drawing is so large that each tooth is the size of a football ground. No tree or bush was damaged and each furrow was seeded so the work will grow into a living image. "His background as a mining engineer helped him," said Ms Righetti, "because he has done hundreds of thousands of calculations in order to measure and understand how things fit together."

Anderson said he was inspired by the huge line drawings of spiders and birds on Peru's Nazca Plain. *Sunday Mirror, 2 Dec; Melbourne Age, D.Telegraph, 3 Dec 2001.*



ALEXANDER TOMLINSON

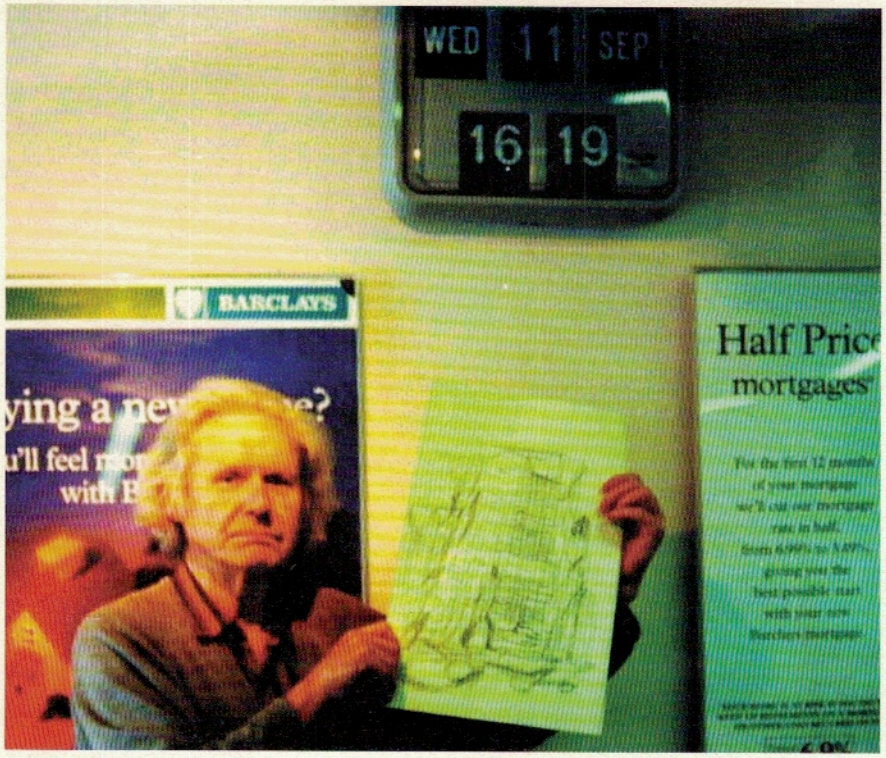
WHAT A WANKER!

AN ARTWORK BY MEXICAN ARTIST Israel Mora was exhibited at the Banff Center in Alberta, Canada, on 29 November. Entitled 'Level 7', it consisted of a cooler suspended between two trees, containing seven glass vials into which Mora had ejaculated. A label on the suspended cooler read: "In memory of a family without a memory. Warning contents: 60ml of semen extracted through masturbation distributed among seven glass tubes. Action in seven days by Jose Israel Mora Lara."

Prior to putting it on display, Mora and Banff Center officials took the cooler on a one-hour walk through the resort town. The work "identifies the body as the origin of private impulses, and Mr. Mora undertook a private act and examined the ways in which it intersects with a public context," according to a publicity handout. Following a front page story in the *National Post* on 5 December headlined "Banff Arts Center Pays For Mexican To Bottle His Fluid", there were some complaints about the work, since the Banff Center is funded in part by the federal government. "We support freedom of expression on both hands – by artists and members of the public," said Connie MacDonald, spokeswoman for the Center. *[AFP] 5 Dec 2001.*

PREDICTIONS HIT BULLSEYE

British and Australian psychics who foresaw Concorde crash and 11 September disaster



ATLANTIC SYNDICATION/MARK RICHARDS

SPOT ON: Mandell at the bank in 1996 with his sketch of the WTC disaster.

THE SEER OF SUDBURY HILL

David Mandell, a 68-year-old artist and former lecturer in engineering drawing at the Guildhall University, has regular prophetic dreams. On waking, he sketches or paints what he has "seen" and goes to his local Barclays Bank in Sudbury Hill, Harrow, north London, where the pictures are photographed beside the time and date displayed at the counter.

During the small hours of 11 September 1996 he dreamed about the Statue of Liberty and saw the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center collapsing into each other as if "embracing". Later that day, his drawing was photographed by Avi Sharma, a member of the bank staff.

His first significant dream happened when he was six and living in Watford. War would break out, he said, and the residents on his housing estate would have to collect gas masks at a particular nearby farm. This came to pass. During the Blitz, he told his teachers and classmates that two bombs would fall in a certain place in a local park. When his prediction was fulfilled the following night, he was ostracised by his classmates. "Some of the parents said I must be in league with the Devil," he recalled. His dreams also frightened his parents, strict Welsh Baptists.

He first started painting his dreams about 30 years ago and the bank idea was suggested to him in the mid-Eighties. His "major event" premonitions, as he calls them, are "vivid, longish and nearly always in colour. I have a particular sense of place, even if I have never been [there]."

In February 1988 he painted what he said were two pleasure boats colliding in the Thames. The Marchioness disaster was in August the following year. Some dreams, which he calls "symbolic", are open to a wider interpretation. On 14 October 1987, for instance, he painted 16 Hawker Hurricane fighter planes. Two days later, Britain was hit by the Great Hurricane.

He has been prolific and accurate in his earthquake predictions, particularly the Armenian disaster, which killed 25,000 in 1988, two weeks after a Mandell dream. In 1991 he painted a dome, with an eye at its centre, exploding over London. This was reported in the local press but resisted interpretation until the millennium, when (as Mandell ingeniously points out) the dome was a disaster and the London Eye a success.

A drawing entitled "Concorde Crash", photographed in the bank on 12 June 1997, appears to show a delta-winged white aircraft streaming flame. A French flag flies in one corner. The Air France Concorde crashed near Paris on 25 July 2000.

Not all his foresight comes during sleep. Waking premonitions have stopped him boarding a train that crashed and a ship that was in a collision. Once, at the urging of the bank tellers, he predicted six lottery numbers. The first three numbers came up, but the next three were wrong, so the syndicate netted only £10 each.

"I am sure all of us are sent dreams," he said, "through some sort of television system, but only a few people like me take any notice. Most will just dismiss them and they will be forgotten." He believes that time is non-linear and the disasters he dreams have already happened. Despite this, he has tried in the past to warn the relevant authorities – the Russian embassy in the case of the Armenian earthquake and the Foreign Office over the dreamed assassination of the president of the Comoros Islands. Mandell has dreamed an earthquake in Hawaii, so readers have been warned. *Summarised from Richard Pendlebury's report in D.Mail, 1 Dec 2001.*

SUCCESS DOWN UNDER

In 1996, Scott Russell Hill and Rosemary Waller scored a number of hits on their weekly Adelaide radio show, *Psychic Saturday Night*. "The last time Nostradamus was spoken about was when the World Trade Center was bombed [1993]," said Hill. "My strongest feeling is that if the WTC has been attacked once, it can be attacked again…" Waller said a new terrorist threat would emerge in 2001. "The key months to look for will be September, October and November and it will be unexpected."

During the broadcast on 28 September 1996, Hill said of Princess Diana: "She's just had her 35th birthday… I don't think she'll reach 40… I had a dream she wasn't on it [the cover of a woman's magazine]. Instead, there was a picture of the Eiffel Tower and my initial thought in the dream was, 'Why isn't Diana here [on the cover]?' And I thought, 'Well, it's because she's dead.' Whether it's connected to Paris or France, or something to do with the French…" (Her fatal Paris crash took place on 31 August 1997.)

Hill also said that Prince William was in grave danger of being killed in a skiing or car accident and that the next British king would be Prince Harry. During the same broadcast, Hill said: "The Concorde is going to have a disaster… a terrible explosion… there's going to be loss of life… it's in France." (The Concorde crash of 25 July 2000 killed all 113 on board.) As in the case of many other wild talents such as clairvoyance or psychokinetic ability, the psychic powers of both Hill and Waller were allegedly activated following head trauma when they were children. At the age of seven, Hill fell off a pier and banged his head on a boat. He sank beneath the water and had a near-death experience before being rescued by his father. As a five-year-old, Waller was being driven by her mother when the latter lost control and hit a tree in Glenelg, South Australia. *Woman's Day (Australia), 12 Nov 2001.*

JUST DRIFTING

TWO SAMOAN FISHERMEN were rescued on 7 November after surviving more than four months adrift in a twin-hulled aluminium dinghy on a diet of fish, rainwater and the occasional seabird or floating coconut. Two companions - Tofi Lauvi, 42, and To'o Ioani, 59 - died of starvation and were buried at sea as the 25ft (7.6m) vessel drifted 2,500 miles (4,000km) across the South Pacific.

Lafaili Tofi (or Lapahele Sopi), 36, and Telea Pa'a, 27, were recovering in hospital in Papua New Guinea. "One looked like he had come out of a Nazi war camp," said Dr Barry Kirby, from Alotau hospital in Milne Bay province. "He was probably one week from death."

The men left Samoa on 28 June, but their boat began to sink under the weight of their catch. They ditched two outboard motors and most of their fish, but currents dragged them out to sea. They floated into view off Papua's south-eastern tip 132 days later. They set off their final flare and waved a loin cloth, which was spotted by Lai Luwaina, a villager from Normanby Island, who rowed out and towed them ashore. *[AP] Brisbane Courier Mail, 12 Nov; D.Telegraph, 13 Nov 2001. For other remarkable drifters, see FT48:16, 53:18.*

A PAIR OF CURSES LIFTED?

On the strength of some recent games, Manchester United must have thought they had become a cursed team, with a rash of unthinkable defeats making their chances of retaining the Premiership title exceedingly slim. Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the whole affair was that the fickle finger of fate seemed to be pointing at one player in particular - the recently transferred defender Laurent Blanc.

LAURENT BLANC/BLEU BLANC ROUGE

Football conspiracy theorists were quick to point out that the opening letters of the teams that had so far beaten the reigning champions (Newcastle, Bolton, Liverpool, Arsenal and Chelsea) could be rearranged to spell... Blanc. To add to Manchester United's woes, they later lost at home to West Ham - although this didn't seem to possess any arcane significance.

As we write, the team's fortunes seem to have picked up; having regained eight points on the leaders, they are once again favourites to win the championship. *Sunday Herald, Observer, Soccernet; 2 Dec 2001.*

Greek monks from the religious community of Mount Athos have lifted a curse that villagers on the Aegean island of Limnos should "never sleep again" for triggering an Ottoman massacre. While most of Greece won independence from the Ottomans in the 1820s, Limnos remained part of the empire for almost another century.

"Villagers killed some Turks and had thrown them down a well on the property belonging to the Mount Athos monastery," said Kostas Adamidis, the mayor of Moudros. The Turks, blaming the monks, slaughtered them and set fire to all their buildings. Two monks managed to escape and return to the Koutloumousi monastery, where they put the curse on the villagers. Ever since, monks have chanted the curse against Moudros on 23 August. This year on the designated date, a delegation from the monastery, including its abbot and four monks, arrived in Moudros for a three-day ceremony to lift the curse. *[R] 23 July, 25 Aug 2001.*

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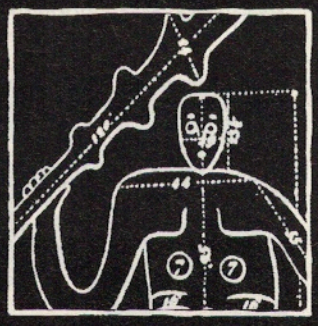

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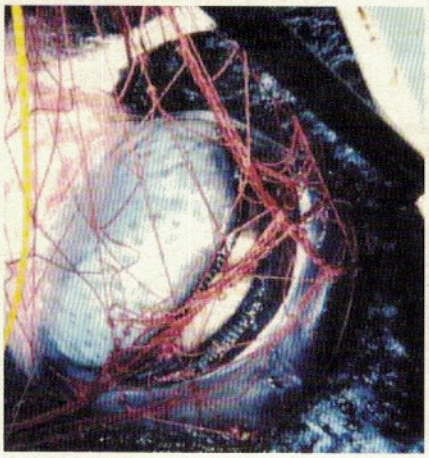
KARL SHUKER'S ALIEN ZOO

This month Dr Karl Shuker looks at unknown Australian animals, Norwegian sea serpents, a captured shark and a newly discovered whale and ponders the possible survival of the mapinguary, the giant ground sloth of the Amazon.



PROPERTY OF NMFS, PHOTO BY W. HABICH

CATCH OF THE DAY: The 18 ft (5.5m) long megamouth netted off San Diego by Californian fishermen.

CZ IN OZ

Saturday 20 October 2001 saw the first cryptozoological conference to be held in Australia, which proved to be a great success. Entitled 'Myths and Monsters 2001', and organised by Ruby Lang (publisher of online magazine *Strange Nation*), it was held at History House in Sydney's Macquarie Street, and was well attended throughout the day, lasting from 9am to 6pm. Proceedings began with an hour-long paper by Paul Cropper, outlining the history of Australian cryptozoology. Other speakers included Australian Yowie Research founder Dean Harrison, Malcolm Smith on Aussie sea monsters, Peter Chapple on ABCs Down Under as well as the thylacine, Prof Gary Opit on the bunyip (seen on an Australian stamp, above), Tony Healy on 'high strangeness' in yowie reports, and Bill Chalker on the Ferndale flap of 1927 (in which some truly bizarre entities were reported, such as 'big bird' creatures and 'elephant humanoids'). The conference ended with an hour-long debate by the speakers concerning the evidence for Australia's mystery beasts. *[AAP] 20 Oct 2001;* ***http://www.strangenation.com.au/cryptoconf.htm Oct 2001.***

THE COLOUR PURPLE

Another controversial Aussie animal hit the headlines in October when a paper published by a team of Macquarie University researchers provided persuasive mitochondrial DNA-based genetic evidence that the purple-necked rock wallaby was a valid species in its own right, as originally proposed when first discovered by Australian zoologist Le Souef in 1924 – and not, as widely maintained since then, just a subspecies of the black-footed rock wallaby *Petrogale lateralis*. It will be known as *P. purpureicollis*, commemorating its most celebrated claim to fame – the very distinctive purple coloration that appears on its neck and upper back at certain times of the year, but whose precise production mechanism and the reason for it remain unresolved. Indeed, because it is readily washed off in rain and also fades rapidly once the animal is dead, many scientists had long (but erroneously) supposed that this pigment's origin was external, caused possibly by the wallaby rubbing its neck on mossy rocks, rather than genuinely being secreted by the wallaby itself. *Australian Journal of Zoology, vol.49, pp323–43, (2001).*

NEWS FROM NORWAY

Water monster researcher Erik Knatterud has launched a website comprising a national register of Norwegian sea serpents. It also contains details of Norwegian lake monster sightings. Among the most notable recent reports is one dating from the second half of November 2001, concerning a creature measuring approximately 45 ft (14m) long that was sighted resting at the surface of Lake Mjoesa's south end, then diving. This lake is situated north of Oslo and Gardermoen airport. ***http://www.mjoesormen.no***

ANOTHER MEGAMOUTH

On 19 October 2001, a male megamouth shark *Megachasma pelagios*, roughly 18ft (5.5m) long, was caught alive in a drift gillnet by a commercial swordfish vessel sited about 42 miles (68km) north-west of San Diego, California.

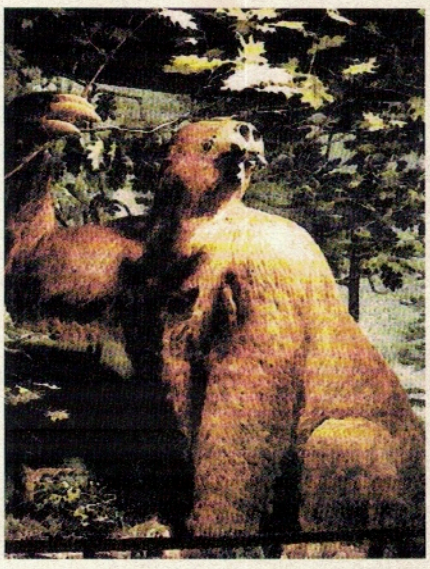
After a US National Marine Fisheries Service observer aboard the vessel had photographed its unexpected catch and taken a tissue biopsy, this latest recorded megamouth specimen was released in good condition. ***http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/mega15.htm***

A WHALE OF A DISCOVERY

A further sizeable surprise from the deep is a new species of *ziphiid* or beaked whale of the genus *Mesoplodon*. Several new *Mesoplodon* species have been described during the past 100 years based upon dead specimens and morphological evidence, and genetic analyses may unmask a number of others. This latest find is to be known as Perrin's beaked whale, in honour of researcher WF Perrin, and will be formally christened and described in an upcoming issue of the journal *Marine Mammal Science. Darren Naish, cz@yahoogroups.com 13 Dec 2001.*

MEETINGS WITH THE MAPINGUARY

Back in 1993, zoologist Dr David Oren, based at that time in Belem, Brazil, published a *Goeldiana* paper on his researches concerning the mapinguary – an Amazonian mystery beast that he believes may be a surviving species of ground sloth. At that time, he had not actually spoken to anyone alleging to have killed a mapinguary. However, since then he has conducted expeditions in search of the beast during which he spoke to seven local hunters who claim to have shot specimens of this creature, as well as to another 80 people who have supposedly seen one. These and other details have now been published by Oren in a second paper, updating his mapinguary investigations. Whether he will be able to continue further with them, however, is another matter, as he has recently moved several thousand miles away from the Amazon, to take up a new post in Brasilia. *World Conservation Union's Edentate Specialist Group Newsletter, Winter 2001; [R] 18 Dec 2001.*



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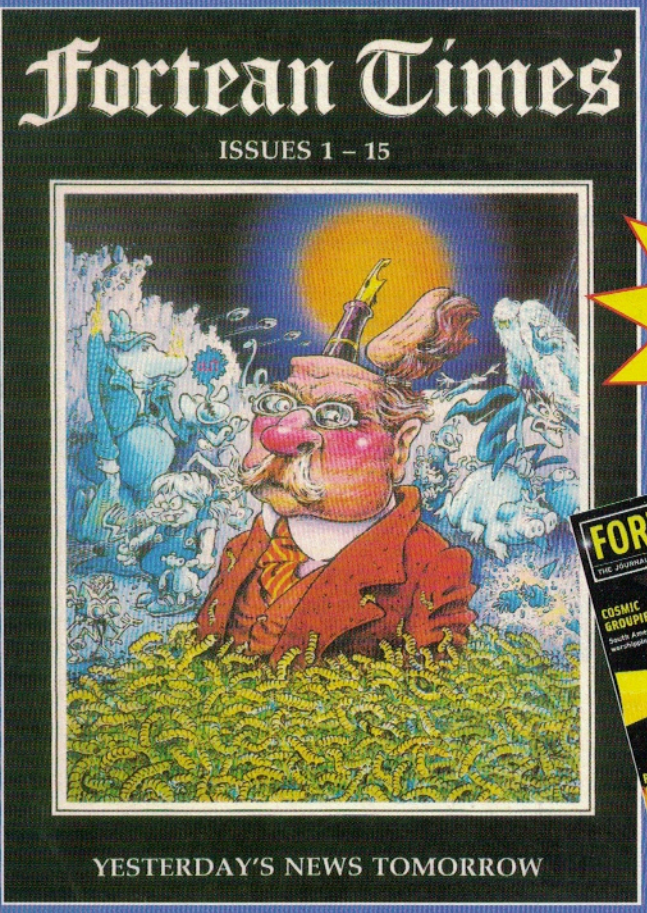

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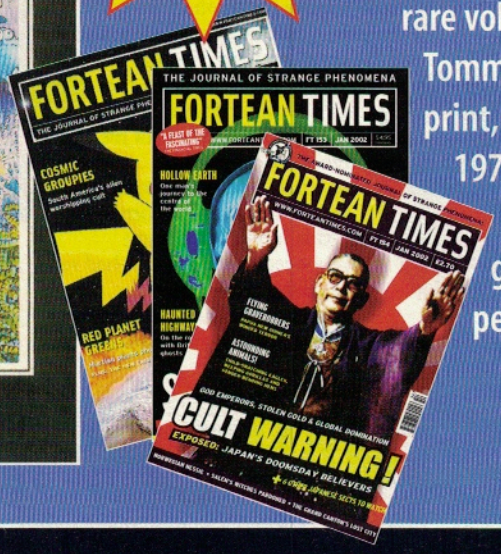

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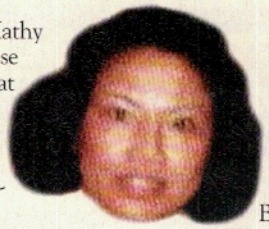
S406

MARKED MICROBIOLOGISTS

A series of strange deaths – including a ritualistic murder – in the halls of science



On Halloween last year, Kathy Nguyen, 61, a Vietnamese immigrant who worked at the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, died of inhalation anthrax, the fourth fatality in a month of bioterrorism attacks. Unlike the earlier deaths, hers defied comprehension. She had no connection with the known spore-laced letters; no trace of the bacteria was found anywhere she was known to have been in the previous weeks. Investigators said she might have crossed paths with whoever distributed the spores. While the attacks remain unexplained, US law enforcement has tentatively blamed a lone American opportunist with a grudge.

On 14 December, microbiologist Set Van Nguyen, 44, suffocated in a biological storage area at the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's animal diseases facility in Geelong, Victoria State, Australia, where he had worked for 15 years. The room was full of deadly gas which had leaked from a liquid nitrogen cooling system. A year earlier, a spectacularly virulent mousepox (related to smallpox) was accidentally created among laboratory mice at the Geelong facility.

Nguyen is a common Vietnamese name and the deaths are probably a coincidence, but during the intervening weeks several prominent bio-researchers were targeted.

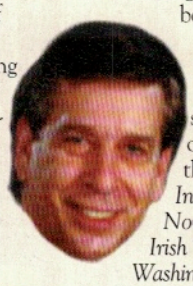
On 12 November, Dr Benito Que, a cell biologist working on infectious diseases such as HIV, was found comatose outside his laboratory at the Miami Medical School. According to the *Miami Herald*, "the word among his friends is that four men armed with a baseball bat attacked him at his car."

Three days later, Harvard microbiologist Don Wiley vanished. He was last seen leaving a banquet in the Peabody Hotel, Memphis, just before midnight on November 15. His hired car was found four hours later, abandoned on a Mississippi River bridge five minute's drive away with the keys in the ignition and a full petrol tank.

Dr Wiley was one of America's leading experts on the human immune system and had recently investigated AIDS and Ebola. He was in Memphis to attend a two-day annual meeting of a hospital advisory board on which he had served for about 10 years. William Evans, the hospital's deputy director, said Wiley seemed "in a great frame of mind" and was looking forward to time with his family when he left the banquet. The 57-year-old married father of two had no known financial or domestic problems. On 20 December, his body was found in Louisiana, about 300 miles (480km) downstream. The cause of death has not yet been announced.

Dr Vladimir Pasechnik, 64, a former microbiologist for Biopreparat, the Soviet biological-weapons production facility, died in Wiltshire on 23 November. According to *The Times* obituary a week later, his defection to Britain in 1989 "revealed to the West for the first time the colossal scale of the Soviet Union's clandestine biological warfare programme… one of the best kept secrets of the Cold War."

For 10 years after his defection, Pasechuk worked at the British Department of Health's Centre for Applied Microbiology Research before forming his own company, Regma Biotechnics, to work on therapies for infectious diseases. In the last few weeks of his life he had shared his research on anthrax with the Government. A former British Intelligence agent announced that Pasechuk had suffered a fatal stroke.



On 10 December, Dr Robert M Schwartz, 57, a founding member of the Virginia Biotechnology Association where he worked on DNA sequencing analysis for 15 years, was found stabbed to death in his secluded farmhouse south-west of Leesberg, Virginia. Two days later, three acquaintances of Dr Schwarz's youngest daughter were charged with his murder, described as a "ritualistic slaying", but the authorities would not comment on a motive. His body was found face-down with an "X" carved into the back of his neck.

It's possible that nothing connects this string of events; but like the deaths between 1982 and 1988 of 25 scientists connected with the defence industry (particularly Marconi), many of which were bizarre or mysterious – see ***FT49:14, 55:64, 58:30*** – it offers ample fodder for the conspiracy theorist or thriller writer.

Int. Herald Tribune, 31 Oct, 1+7+8 Nov; North Bay (Ont.) Nugget, 17 Nov; Irish Times, 17 Nov, 22 Dec; [AP] 28 Nov; Washington Post, 12+13 Dec 2001; emails from Ian Gurney and Patricia Doyle.

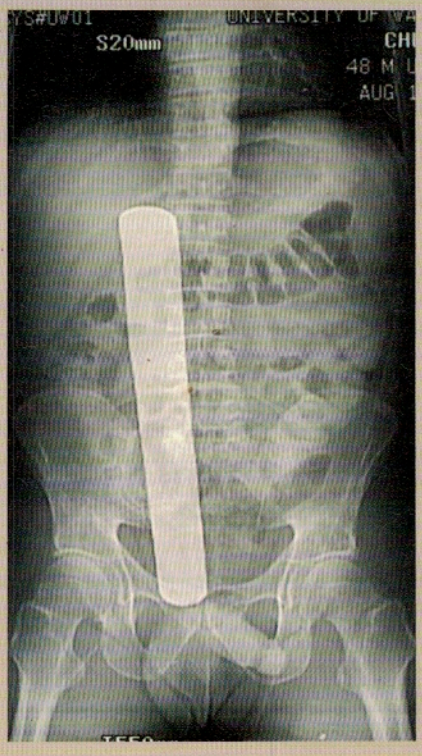
VICTIMS: (clockwise from top) Kathy Nguyen, Bob Schwartz and Don Wiley.

MAN'S METAL MEMENTO

Every time Donald Church moved after an operation to remove a malignant tumour in June 2000, he doubled up in agony; even breathing was painful. Once, he inexplicably set off a metal detector at an airport. When the 49-year-old pest controller from Seattle went back to his surgeons for his 30-day check-up, they told him the pain was just part of the healing process. Eventually, two months after the operation, he went to his doctor who sent him for X-rays, and a 13in (33cm)-long metal bar, known as a retractor, was found lodged between his collar bone and his pelvis.

Surgeons at the University of Washington Hospital had used the retractor, which looks like a small lawnmower blade, to hold back tissue and organs in the four-hour operation, but they forgot to take it out when they sewed him up. The hospital accepted full responsibility and paid Mr Church £65,000. Implements are left in patients in one in 20,000 cases, but these are usually sponges or suturing needles, which are much smaller.

Mirror, Sun, Metro, 6 Dec 2001.



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FT01

TALES FROM AFGHANISTAN

Camp Rhino's Kamikaze camels, Marjon the lion outlives Taliban, Afghanistan's feuding Jews

POPPERFOTO/REUTERS

LIONHEART: Marjon survived everything his tormentors could throw at him - grenades included.

KAMIKAZE CAMELS

One night in early November, US marines based at Camp Rhino in southern Afghanistan saw a camel running inside the camp compound and opened fire. A few days earlier, US intelligence services had warned them about the danger of attack from "kamikaze camels". During their war with Soviet forces during the 1980s, the mujahideen were known to strap explosives to camels and send them towards enemy positions. Then, as the animal wandered near troops or equipment, they would set it off with a remote detonator.

A number of soldiers had fired at the camel. "They put a hell of a lot of rounds in it but they never found it," said Sergeant Erik Knox. Sceptics might suggest that the camel was never found because they either missed or small arms were not enough to bring it down; but Corporal Jesse Mendoza insists they hit the camel because they had marked it with eight or nine lasers as they fired. Adding to the enigma, just two nights after the camel incident the camp's perimeter fence was attacked by Taliban or al Qa'eda fighters. The marines fired dozens of mortars at the interlopers, but the next day there was no sign of bodies. *BBC News, 12 Dec; Metro, 13 Dec 2001.*

FT correspondent David Hambling comments: "Either the Camp Rhino perimeter is so badly defended that camels can wander in and out, or US Marines hallucinate camels. Or there are some desert phantoms that can appear as camels, or Afghan fighters. It's worth noting that Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood, the Pakistani nuclear scientist who has had meetings with bin Laden on weapons of mass destruction, is a man with esoteric interests. He wrote a book, *Cosmology and Destiny*, on how sunspots influence history (via the electromagnetic effect on brainwaves). He has also suggested that *djinn*, as they are beings of fire, could be a possible power source, so maybe he's been working on utilising genies..."

"I LOVE ALL MY CREATURES, BUT MARJON IS THE ONE I LOVE BEST"

THE LION OF KABUL

The most famous animal in Afghanistan is Marjon the lion, a present from West Germany when the country was still at peace under King Zahir Shah. Then came the Soviet invasion (1979–89), the Mujahideen takeover of Kabul in 1992, followed by the bombardment of the city by the CIA-backed warlord, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which killed thousands and wrecked much of the zoo. One rocket killed the Indian elephant and another took out the aquarium, 100 yards from the pen Marjon shared with a lioness, Quanni. The zoo staff evacuated and returned daily to feed the remaining animals hurriedly between bombardments.

One day a man jumped into the lions' pen and reached out to stroke Marjon's head. Marjon bit off his arm and he later died in hospital. In revenge, his brother lobbed a grenade at the lion. Splinters tore into Marjon's legs and slashed the left side of his mouth. Another piece of shrapnel blinded him in the left eye.

The Taliban took over in 1996, and wanted to close the zoo (because zoos don't feature in the Koran). Head zookeeper Sheer Agha appealed to the mayor (a reasonable Taliban), who obtained a paper from the zoological department at the university saying the zoo had educational purposes and should be kept.

Taliban would visit and throw stones at Marjon. The resident bear still suffers from a badly cut nose after being beaten by a Taliban last April. As famine took hold, the deer and most of the rabbits were grabbed and eaten. Quanni the lioness died in 1999, but somehow Marjon battled on. Today he is 45, a good 15 years past the normal life expectancy of lions. His face is lop-sided, he can barely walk and is almost totally blind. "I have 19 creatures and I love them all," said Mr Agha in November. "But Marjon is the one I love best." *Eve. Standard, 20 Nov; Irish Times, Sun, 21 Nov; Guardian, 27 Nov 2001.*

THE ODD COUPLE

The last two Jews left in Afghanistan hate each other with a vengeance. Isaak Levi, 70ish, and Zavolan/Zebolan Simantov, 49, hail from Herat and now live in the same building in Kabul's Flower Street that locals call the 'Jewish mosque', sharing a kitchen. Each looks after his own crumbling synagogue, from which the other is banned – but the last prayers to be said in a synagogue in Kabul were in 1990. Simantov deals in rugs and handicrafts; Levi seems to scrape a living as a fortune-teller and palmist.

The *casus belli* has been the last Torah – a scroll containing the Pentateuch – in Afghanistan, hand-written on deer hide 500 years ago. The Taliban might never have known the two men were there if they hadn't denounced each other as thieves and spies for Israel. Both men were repeatedly arrested and beaten and the Torah was confiscated. *NY Post, 27 Nov; Irish Times, 3 Dec; D.Telegraph, 4 Dec 2001; Guardian, 5 Jan 2002.*

Advertisement

A Startling Memory Feat That You Can Do

How I learned the secret in one evening. It has helped me every day.

WHEN my old friend Richard Faulkner invited me to a dinner party at his house, I little thought it would be the direct means of doubling my salary in less than two years. Yet it was, and here is the way it all came about.

Towards the end of the evening things began to drag a bit as they often do at parties. Finally someone suggested the old idea of having everyone do a 'party-piece'. Some sang, others forced weird sounds out of the piano, recited, told stories and so on.

Then it came to Peter Brown's turn. He said he had a simple 'trick' which he hoped we would like. First he asked to be blindfolded. Those present were to call out 25 random numbers of three figures each, such as 161, 249, and so on. He asked me to list the numbers in order as they were called.

Peter then astounded everyone by repeating the entire list of 25 numbers backwards and forwards. Then he asked people to request numbers by their position in the list, such as the eighth number called, the fourth number and so on. Instantly he repeated back the correct number in the positions called. He did this with the entire list — over and over again without making a single mistake.

Then Peter asked someone to shuffle a deck of cards and call them out in order. Still blindfolded he instantly named the cards in their order backwards and forwards.

You may well imagine our amazement at Peter's remarkable feat. You naturally expect to see a thing of this sort on television or the stage. Even then you look upon it as a trick. But to see it done by an ordinary businessman, in plain view of everyone, blindfolded and under conditions which make trickery impossible, is astonishing to say the least.

* * * * *

On the way home that evening I asked Peter Brown how it was done. He said there was really nothing to it — simply a memory feat, the key to which anyone could easily learn in one evening. The reason most people have bad memories is because they leave memory development to chance. Anyone could do what he had done and develop a good memory, he said, by following a few simple rules. And then he told me exactly how to do it. At the time, I little thought that evening would prove to be one of the most eventful in my life, but that's what it proved to be.

What Peter said I took to heart. In one evening I made remarkable strides towards improving my memory. In just a few days I learned to do exactly what he had done. At first I amused myself with my new-found ability by amazing people at parties. Everyone was talking about my 'memory feat', and I was showered with invitations to all sorts of occasions. People often asked me how they also could become more popular and successful. I used to tell them to learn my 'memory feat' — but this is apart from what I want to tell you now.

The most gratifying thing about the improvement of my memory was the remarkable way it helped me in business. I discovered that my memory training had literally put a razor edge on my mind. My thinking had become clearer, quicker, keener. I was fast acquiring that mental grasp and alertness I had so often admired in men who were spoken of as "brilliant" and "geniuses".

Then I noticed a marked improvement in my writing and conversational powers. Formerly my writing and talk was halting and disconnected. I could never think of things to say until the conversation was over. But now words and ideas leap into my mind. I never have to search for the right word, the right expression or the right thing to say. Instantly I find myself impressing people with bright, sparkling conversation.

It wasn't long before my new-found ability to remember attracted the attention of our Chairman. Since then my salary has increased dramatically.

I found that my ability to remember helped me tremendously in dealing with other people, particularly in meetings. The man who can back up his statements quickly with a string of definite facts and figures dominates every situation. Now it seems as though I never forget anything. I can instantly recall any fact I want to remember as if it were printed in black and white!

* * * * *

These are only a few of the hundreds of ways I have profited by my trained memory. No longer do I suffer the frustration of meeting people I know and not being able to recall their names. The moment I see someone I have met before a name leaps into my mind, together with a string of personal facts. Now I find it easy to recall everything I read. I can now master a subject in considerably less time than before. Price lists, reports, quotations, data of all kinds. I can recall in detail almost at will. I rarely make a mistake.

What's more, I can now do my day's work quicker and with much less effort than before.

What Peter told me that eventful evening was this: "Send for details of Dr. Bruno Furst's Memory Course." I did.

That was my first step in learning to do all the remarkable things I have told you about. In fact, I was so impressed that I got permission to publish Dr. Furst's Course myself.

My advice to you now is don't wait another minute. Full details of Dr. Furst's remarkable Course are available free on request. You will be amazed how a powerful memory can improve your opportunities at work and in your social life. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose by posting the coupon today.

BOB HEAP

* * * * *

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MYTHCONCEPTIONS 44

BY MAT COWARD

LADY GODIVA

ILLUSTRATIONS: HUNT EMERSON

THE MYTH

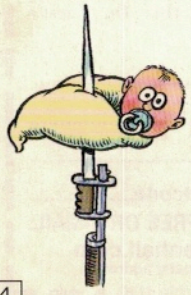
Some time in the 11th century, the beautiful young wife of a nobleman rode naked through the streets of Coventry, to persuade her husband to relieve the town of a crippling tax burden. The grateful townsfolk agreed not to peek, but one local tailor (or naughty boy) couldn't resist copping a butcher's at her loveliness, and as a result "Peeping Tom" was struck blind (or had his eyes gouged out).

THE "TRUTH"

Godiva's husband was Leofric, Earl of Mercia, one of the most powerful men in England. The couple were famous philanthropists (in 1043 they founded an Abbey at Coventry) and as the city grew Leofric became one of its leading citizens. All this is undisputed – but there is no contemporary record of any protest ride, naked or otherwise. The first mention of any horsy business was in the 13th century, by that notorious mythmonger Roger of Wendover. The Peeping Tom story was added in the 17th and 18th centuries. Some authorities argue that Godiva's Ride was invented by the early tourism industry in Coventry; if so, it was a remarkably successful creation, given that it's still widely believed today.

DISCLAIMER Those are the bare facts, but *FT* would be pleased to hear further details from any experts in undressed equestrianism.

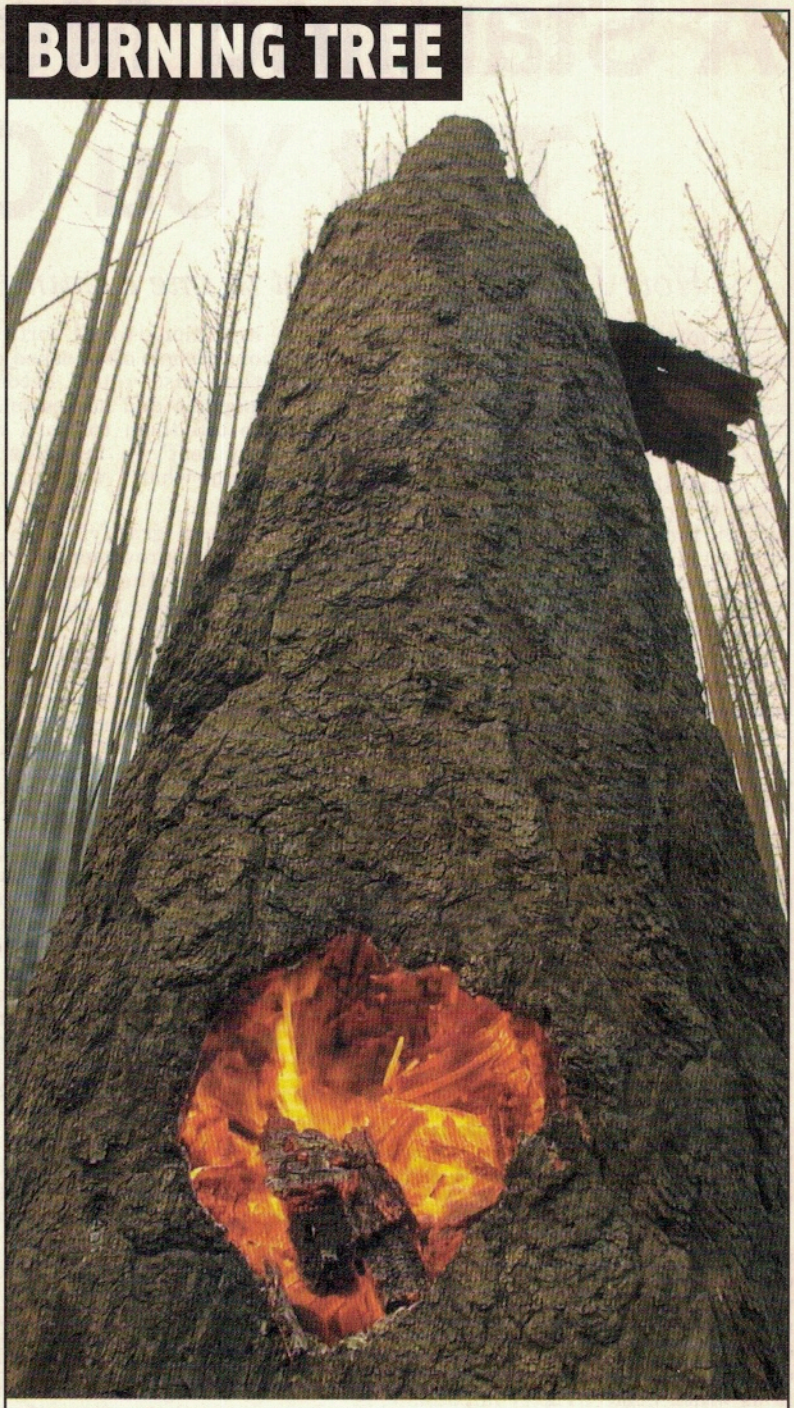
SOURCES On the Internet, www.bbc.co.uk/history and UselessKnowledge.com; and in print *The Oxford Companion to British History* (edited by John Cannon).



MYTHCHASER

A recent newspaper interview with NATO secretary-general Lord Robertson contained this line: "In the last year of the 20th century there were Yugoslav soldiers putting babies on bayonets." Does anyone know when this absurd image, so popular with warmongers, was first used?

BURNING TREE

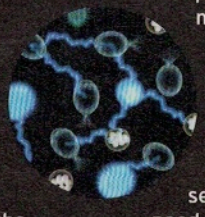


AP PHOTO/DOUGLAS C PIZAC

THE INSIDE OF THIS PINE TREE in the Moose Fire area, west of Glacier National Park in Montana, had been burning like a furnace for four days, the hollowed trunk acting like a chimney, when this photograph was taken on 30 August. Fire crews had been battling a 17,000 acre wildfire in the area for the previous two weeks. *[AP] 30 Aug 2001.*

WATER POWER

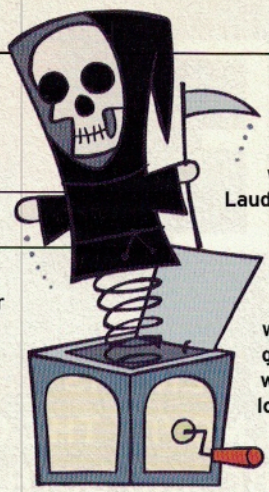
Scientists at the US Naval Research Laboratory have discovered a free, constant and indefinite (if tiny) source of power thanks to plankton. Dead plankton fall to the sea floor, where they are deposited as organic, or reduced carbon, matter in the sediment. The Ocean Sediment Carbon Aerobic Reactor – OSCAR – managed to generate 50 milliwatts of power in just one square metre by making use of reactions occurring in the seawater and the sediment. It is thought that OSCAR would be a perfect substitute for the batteries in underwater sensors which currently need to be replaced regularly. *New Scientist, 6 Oct 2001.*



ALEX TOMLINSON

STRANGE DEATHS

A COMPENDIUM OF MACABRE DEPARTURES FROM THIS EARTH



TERRY COLON

IN EARLY NOVEMBER, TAKAKO KONISHI, 28, left her home in Tokyo to travel to North Dakota to hunt for a briefcase containing almost $1 million buried by a fictional character in the 1995 cult film *Fargo*. In the film, a villain played by Steve Buscemi stops his car in a snowy landscape with no features except a wire fence and fence posts, where he buries the case.

On 10 November, Konishi was reported to police in the small city of Bismarck after she was seen wandering near the city dump and Oasis truckstop. When officers interviewed her, she showed them a crude map of a tree next to a highway, supposedly indicating where the money was hidden. "We tried to explain to her that it was a fictional movie and there really wasn't any treasure," said Lt Nick Sevart, but Konishi spoke little English and the police department had no Japanese interpreter. Since she hadn't broken any law, the police had no reason to hold her. They took her to the bus station, where she bought a ticket for Fargo. Two days later, she took a taxi to the village of Detroit Lakes, saying she was interested in seeing the Leonid meteor showers away from city lights. On 15 December, a hunter found her body in woodland near Detroit Lakes, which lies on a road between Fargo and Brainerd.

Police, who were waiting for the results of an autopsy, said she was wearing only light clothing and the temperature had dropped to -3°C (26°F) two nights before her body was found. They believe she may have been confused by opening credits for the film, which claimed it was based on a real incident in 1987 – but this wasn't true. *Bismarck Tribune, 4 Dec; Bergen Record (Hackensack, NJ), 8 Dec; D.Telegraph, 11 Dec 2001.*

RICHARD WELLS, 19, OF INISFAIL, northern Queensland, died after being electrocuted when a wave crashed through a cabin window and swamped him while he was using a Sony PlayStation. He was taking a break from his duties as a deckhand on the trawler *Arrow Sea*. His game console was on a metal table and plugged into an on-board power supply. Three other crew members suffered electric shocks and burns as they tried to help him. *D.Star, Metro, 30 Nov 2001.*

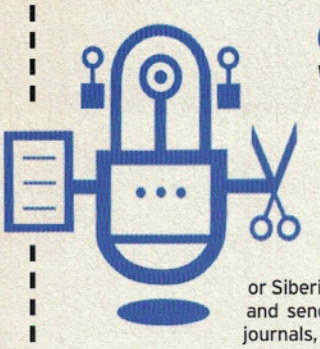
THE TRADITIONAL PRE-CHRISTMAS SWINE slaughter in the Hungarian village of Darvaspuszta turned to tragedy on 24 November when an unnamed Croat was electrocuted attempting to knock out a pig with a homemade pig-stunner. Then a local man was hospitalised with an irregular heart rhythm after attempting a rescue by trying to unplug the device. The pig's owner was so shocked by all this that he suffered a fatal heart attack. There was no word on the fate of the pig. *[R] Observer, 25 Nov 2001.*

LEON RESNICK, 31, WAS TRYING OUT a customised jet-propelled water bike on a lake north of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on 15 November, travelling at about 55 mph (88km/h), when he was killed in an apparent collision with a flying duck. A co-worker who was watching turned to pick up a radar gun to check Resnick's speed, and when he turned back Resnick was no longer aboard the craft. He died of a blow to his head, while the unfortunate bird's carcass was found nearby. There were feathers on the water bike's handlebars. *[AP] 20 Nov 2001.*

A 28-YEAR-OLD IRANIAN BRIDEGROOM died instantly when he licked honey from his bride's finger during their marriage ceremony in the northwestern city of Qazvin and choked to death on one of her false nails. The bride was rushed to hospital after fainting from shock. Iranian couples lick honey from each other's fingers when they get married so that their life together starts sweetly. *[R] 12 Dec 2001.*

ANDREAS PLACK, 23, BLED TO DEATH in Merano, Italy, after persuading his cousin, Christian Kleon, 29, to cut open his leg with a chainsaw so that he could claim £330,000 on an insurance policy. Keon was charged with murder. *[R] Sun, 1 Dec 2001.*

GEORGE KAFATOS, A CUSTOMER IN A crowded Athens restaurant, was killed by a flying lamb chop when an oven exploded. Five other diners were hurt. *Sunday Mercury, 10 June 2001.*



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To minimise the time spent on preparing clippings for a Fort Sort, we ask that you cut them out and not fold them too small. Ideally, send them flat in an A4 stiff envelope. Mark each clip (on the front, where possible) with the source, date and your name, so that we can credit you in the listing (right) when we use the material. For UK local and overseas clips, please give the town of publication. For foreign language clips, we appreciate brief translations. **To avoid confusion over day and month, please write the date in this form: 11 Aug 2001.** If you send photocopies, copy on one side of the paper only.

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THE MOTHM

THE FLAP STARTS HERE AS BOB RICKARD INTRODUCES THE MOVIE, THE ORIGINAL BOOK AND THE STORY BEHIND BOTH. ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN KASNER.

Mark Pellington's new movie *The Mothman Prophecies* will be the first encounter that many readers and viewers will have had with one of the seminal topics of ufology and forteana. In the film Richard Gere plays 'John Klein', an experienced *Washington Post* journalist whose wife dies from a brain tumour discovered after a car crash under odd circumstances. The accident may have been caused by her vision of a sinister shape with glowing red eyes. Sensing its importance, she makes sketches of this 'winged creature' over and over as she is dying.

Two years later, Klein drives to Richmond on assignment but, in a 'missing time' experience, instead ends up 400 miles (650km) away in Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Confused as to how he got there, he seeks help – only to be confronted by a hostile family who accuse him of harassing them on previous visits. The pragmatic Klein decides to investigate other weird local happenings and he and his new friends experience disturbing premonitions, encounters with the winged entity (Mothman) and an all-knowing alien voice that contacts Klein via his motel-room phone. Later, Klein returns to Point Pleasant just in time to witness the collapse of the Silver Bridge that crossed the Ohio River, killing many. The 'prophecies', it seems, pointed to this terrible disaster, which devastated a community.

SCREEN GEMS/MELISSA MOSELEY

MOTHMAN: Pellington on set.

That's the film; what's the reality? Mark Pellington's movie is loosely based on the events described in John Keel's book *The Mothman Prophecies* (1975). There really was a Silver Bridge at Point Pleasant, linking West Virginia with Ohio, and it really did collapse on 15 December 1967. The bridge fed directly into town and a traffic light, stuck on red, caused traffic to back up across the bridge. A vital pin in one of the rigid suspension chains sheered and the structure, including one massive tower, collapsed in minutes, falling 100 feet (30m) to the icy water below. Forty-six people died; two of them were never found.

During the early 1960s, reports of UFO-like activity in this region of West Virginia attracted the attention of ufologists, who associated it with bizarre sightings of huge winged humanoids along the Ohio River valley leading up to a large number of well-reported encounters around Point Pleasant in November 1966 – see page 28.

By the time veteran journalist and fortean John Keel arrived nearly everyone in town had (or knew someone who had) a story to tell. But Keel's investigation also stirred up new phenomena: he found witnesses had been visited by Men in Black who threatened them to keep quiet and who seemed more like badly-briefed aliens than humans; he'd turn up at places to find messages left for him from an entity called 'Indrid Cold' who also tormented Keel over the phone.

Later, back in New York, Keel learned of the collapse of the Silver Bridge and the idea dawned that the UFOs, the entities, the disembodied voices and poltergeist activity were all connected somehow as omens of the coming disaster. Other explanations put the blame on a 200-year-old curse by the last great Shawnee chief in the area; or a giant bird mutated by industrial pollution; or some government mind-control experiment.

While the movie credits refer (strangely) to Keel's book as "a novel", there is no doubt that the book made a great impression on a generation of ufologists and forteans. The book was more than simply about Keel's distinctive theories concerning powerful 'ultraterrestrial' beings who can control our perceived reality, it was also intensely personal. The investigator himself has an integral role in the unfolding drama which, eerily, seemed to be interacting with his investigation. In its own way, Keel's book had as profound and as far-reaching an effect on those fields as did, say, Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968) on the anthropology of shamanism and for similar reasons.

Director Mark Pellington told *FT* that previous scripts of Keel's book failed because they were too literal. He was more interested in the psychological – and, indeed, spiritual – predicament of the witnesses than in making a film about

IAN SPECIAL

"SANE PEOPLE ARE FACED WITH UNBELIEVABLE EVENTS"

UFOs or an alien creature. Producer Gary Lucchesi called their approach "Hitchcockian... It's what happens when sane, reasonable people are faced with the unbelievable." Every witness sees something different and yet these variations are interconnected. This variance – or adaptation – is the aspect of accounts of the paranormal that confounds the rationalists and sceptics.

As witnesses are drawn more into the phenomenon itself, they are unable to distinguish between reality and hallucination or between the real and the surreal. They face deeper involvement, leading to some kind of epiphany or visionary experience – apparently, something that Gere realised was relevant to the founding experiences of a number of religions. The film does a creditable job of exploring the slippery, dream-like world of people (including investigators) who 'get too close'.

The choice before Gere's 'everyman', as he tries to understand the mystery, is to succumb, to 'go with the flow', and risk fatal rapture (as does Will Patton's character) or to extricate himself and live with unanswered questions (as does Alan Bates' character). The exploration of this dilemma is very much in the spirit underlying fortean studies as the film takes us beyond the questions of aliens and life after death to the nature of reality and existence.

And yes, Pellington replied, they had their share of strange coincidences and accidents in making the film and put it down to the Mothman phenomenon.

SCREEN GEMS/MELISSA MOSELEY

TROUBLED WATERS: The Silver Bridge collapses in the new *Mothman* movie.

MOTHMAN COMETH

Mothman? Who he? Just be very glad you've never caught his eye, says BOB RICKARD. The original witnesses are still frightened 35 years later.

The annals of ufology record many encounters with winged humanoids, from the gods of various mythologies to the "gigantic, naked" bat-woman that glided over the US airbase at Da Nang, South Vietnam, in August 1969. Another bizarre example occurred in November 1963 after a group of young men saw a "star" fall into woods near Sandling, in Kent. They were terrified when "a dark figure shambled out. It was all black, about the size of a human but without a head. It seemed to have wings like a bat on either side."

Common elements in witness descriptions include a large, dark humanoid shape taller than a man, bat-like wings, flapping sounds, terrifying howls and large glowing eyes. Some describe its face as 'demonic'; others say it was shrouded in darkness with only glowing red eyes discernable. Nearly all of them speak of a palpable fear as the creature (or whatever it was) seemed to 'notice' and look directly at them.

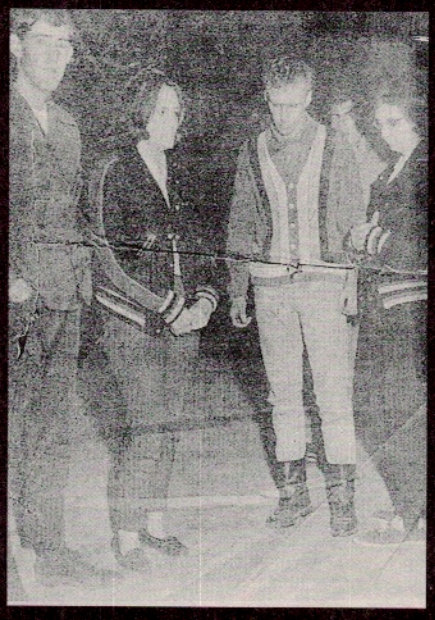
Loren Coleman's new book lists 26 sightings of winged humanoids from 1966-67, most of them in West Virginia. The event which characterises the Mothman phenomenon occurred at midnight on 15 November 1966, on a remote, derelict property north of Point Pleasant, used as a munitions storage complex in WW2. It was known as the 'TNT area' and the place where local courting couples went of an evening. On this occasion, two young, married couples (in the same car) became aware of two huge "red circles" in the shadow of a building. As the "eyes" moved, the couples saw they were part of a dark man-like shape "but bigger", Roger Scarberry later told ufologist Gray Barker. "It had big wings folded against its back." The eyes were hypnotic: "For a minute we could only stare at it. I couldn't take my eyes off it." His wife Linda said: "I don't even know if the eyes are even in a head."

LOREN COLEMAN/FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY

A LARGE DARK SHAPE WITH BAT-LIKE WINGS AND GLOWING RED EYES

When the creature lurched towards them, the teenagers drove off hastily. Then they saw another (or the same one); as they drove past it, it rose straight up, bat-wings unfurled. It glided after them and kept pace as they drove at high speed (around 100 mph) back to town. Mary Mallette told Barker that its wings did not flap and it "squeaked like a big mouse." In town, the terrified youths blurted their story to Deputy Millard Halstead. He had known them all their lives and vouched for the fact that they were seriously frightened. When Linda finally got home, she "went all to pieces". The experience affected her deeply; her account speaks of being afraid to go to sleep, looking overhead whenever she goes out and jumping at little noises.

Later, key witnesses were visited by strangely stiff men dressed in black - the infamous Men in Black - and warned to keep quiet. It was not until John Keel showed up that any of the witnesses felt anyone would take them seriously. To calm their fears, Keel even advised them to display crucifixes in their homes. Linda believes to this day that the sight of a cross near a niece's crib frustrated an attempt to kidnap the baby when an MIB suddenly appeared in their kitchen. As you'll learn in the articles by Rick Moran and Loren Coleman in this issue, the principal witnesses still stand by their original accounts, the mystery of which remains unsolved 35 years later.



ATHENS MESSENGER

IN THE NEWS: A photo from *The Athens Messenger*, 18 Nov 1966, shows the first witnesses returning to the spot where their strange encounter took place (above) and what they saw... (top).

FURTHER READING

Jerome Clark, 'Mothman and Other Winged Entities' in *The Encyclopedia of UFOs, vol 2* (2nd edn, Omnigraphics, 1998).

Loren Coleman, *Mothman and Other Curious Encounters* (Paraview, 2002).

DS & Jeff Walmsley, *Mothman: The Facts Behind the Legend* (Mothman Lives Publishing, 2002)

POINT PLEASANT REVISITED

In 1978, journalist RICK MORAN was asked to test his theory that journalists are better equipped to investigate paranormal mysteries than those seeking to prove or disprove them. The subject of the challenge was the series of events enshrined in John Keel's book *The Mothman Prophecies* (1975). With a small group of fellow researchers, he set out for Mothman's stomping ground, but did not reckon on the Men in Black. This exclusive report has never before been published.

LOREN COLEMAN

DOWNTOWN: Rick Moran visited Point Pleasant in 1978. The town's 1967 disaster was commemorated on a plaque at the bridge site (below).

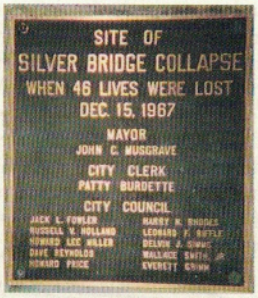
In 1978, I had just finished a round of radio and television talk shows, playing counterpoint to Jay Anson, then promoting his notorious book *The Amityville Horror* (1977). Anson claimed that the house was infested with demons, but his chief proof amounted to nothing more than that the haunting had attracted a visit from the Psychical Research Foundation (PRF).

Asked to address the staff of the PRF on the Campus of Duke University, I proposed that field researchers looking into cases of the unexplained should adopt the tenets of investigative journalism; to look at the human stories together with the unvarnished facts (insofar as they could be discovered). This might better help us understand strange events than either the logical data and natural scepticism of scientists or the efforts of so-called paranormal researchers looking for proof of their pre-existing beliefs.

After the presentation, one PRF researcher asked me whether I had read John Keel's book *The Mothman Prophecies*. I had not, so I was challenged to take a look at the events described therein and to see whether journalistic methods could shed any more light on the mystery.

Beginning in late 1966 and throughout 1967, the village of Point Pleasant, West Virginia, was abuzz with tales of the unexplained. On 15 December 1967, the Silver Bridge that linked West Virginia with Ohio, across the Ohio River, collapsed. These events – which, strangely, ended as abruptly as they began – formed the core of Keel's investigations and *The Mothman Prophecies*, first published in 1975, records flying creatures, UFOs, animal mutilations, Men in Black and what we now call experiences of 'missing time'.

POINT PLEASANT WAS A CONGENIAL LITTLE TOWN OF 5,000 PEOPLE



LOREN COLEMAN

Like Jay Anson's *Amityville Horror*, which offered a wide-ranging mix of hauntings and otherworldly phenomena, *Mothman* seemed to synthesize all UFO-related phenomena into one book. Like *Amityville*, too, it claimed to be a true story… one that many thoughtful readers felt was too good to be true.

The criteria set by Anson in his own defence of *Amityville* were simple. On several occasions, during our radio and television debates, he told me: "You're a journalist, therefore you have to follow the rules of journalism. I'm a writer and your rules simply do not apply to me." In the end, Anson had a bestseller and a movie deal and several folks were quick to tell me that I had done more to stir up interest in *Amityville* than Anson ever did.

In looking at *Mothman*, I assumed the same criteria were in place. John Keel was a best selling author in the field of UFOs and, at first glance, *Mothman* seemed perfect grist for the mill that fed interest in the unexplained. At least one good friend of mine, Joel Martin – a talk show host for WBAB on Long Island – said that Keel should not be compared with writers like Anson; Keel was a good researcher not prone to hyping, Martin said. And so, in the summer of 1978, just over a decade after the bridge tragedy, I was on the road to West Virginia in a small RV, a well-annotated copy of *Mothman* in hand and a sheaf of questions in a worn ring-binder under my arm.

Point Pleasant was a congenial little town of about 5,000 people, and still bore

LOREN COLEMAN

CURSED: The TNT area (left) spooked the team, who suspected Chief Cornstalk's curse (bottom)

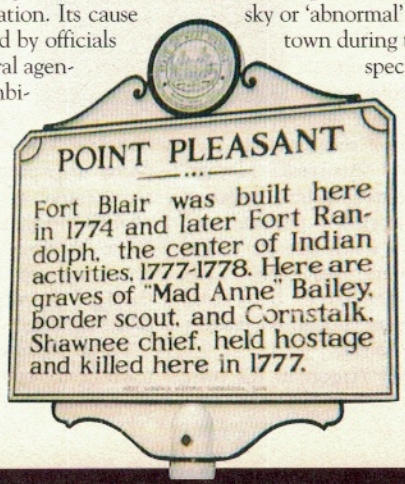
the scars of the Silver Bridge collapse. The bridge supports still stood in the middle of the Ohio River and a plaque now commemorates those who died there in 1967. It was easy to see that the town had grown up around the bridge as it fed traffic across the Ohio River directly into the centre of town. On that fatal day, inbound rush hour traffic had been halted by a traffic signal a block from the bridge and had backed up traffic across it, putting an unbearable load on the old structure.

Of course, Point Pleasant predated the bridge by several hundred years. Once home to Daniel Boone, it saw a great battle on 10 October 1774 at which the Virginians defeated the American Indians. My RV and company of colleagues camped at the battle site – Tu-Endie Wei Park. The treaty that followed the battle stripped Native Americans of their rights to the surrounding lands, forcing them to leave their ancestral hunting and fishing grounds and, eventually, to leave the area altogether. Familiarising ourselves with some basic history and the lay of the land – including a brief visit to the 'TNT area' at the heart of the *Mothman* story – we settled into the camp-ground to plan our next few days.

We agreed early on that the suggestion of a connection between the phenomenon and a curse by the chief of the defeated Indians was not an issue for us to consider. Whether Chief Cornstalk had cursed future residents of the land was immaterial to our investigation, unless we were willing to follow a thread that might tie all UFO phenomena worldwide to ancient curses.

Likewise the Silver Bridge collapse, which so dramatically concluded the phenomenon, was not up for further investigation. Its cause was thoroughly investigated by officials from several state and federal agencies and blamed on a combination of metal wear, structural deterioration, weather, and the weight of static traffic on the bridge at the time; we could add nothing to that. We also agreed that the reported cattle mutilations were now 20 years in the past. Thus we focused on

LOREN COLEMAN


POINT PLEASANT
Fort Blair was built here in 1774 and later Fort Randolph, the center of Indian activities, 1777-1778. Here are graves of "Mad Anne" Bailey, border scout, and Cornstalk, Shawnee chief, held hostage and killed here in 1777.

OUR TEAM'S PSYCHIC SAID SHE HAD A BAD FEELING ABOUT THE PLACE

the UFO activity, which included the reported sightings of Mothman during the 13 months prior to the bridge collapse and the associated appearance of Men in Black (MIBs).

However, we immediately hit a problem; our foray into the TNT area had an unexpected effect on two team members. Although we went in broad daylight, my resident psychic said she had a bad feeling about the place; then my usually-analytical research partner admitted that her blood ran cold just driving through the area. I saw that maintaining our objectivity might be difficult We agreed to leave any further visits to the area to the end of our stay.

Early the next morning, I hit the streets, first stopping at a coffee shop in town and then visiting both the police station and the local newspaper office. My colleagues phoned around, trying to locate people mentioned in the book and set up interviews with them. Bringing up the topic of Mothman in the coffee shop had an interesting result; nearly everyone I spoke to remembered 'the year of the UFOs' and had a theory about it. Most seemed to know someone directly connected to the phenomenon and were willing to vouch for their veracity. Most residents had seen something, whether it was strange lights in the sky or 'abnormal' activity on the outskirts of town during that period. Even the more spectacular claims, they said, were made by people who were not otherwise prone to telling tall tales.

We got a similar reaction at the police station and newspaper office; not one person took the claims lightly, but vouched for the sincerity of those people who told of their 'close encounters' with the phenomenon. I was used to scepticism from public officials and professional journalists and finding its opposite was quite unexpected. Even more intriguing was the fact that many people had other stories to tell, ones which were not included in Keel's book.

I was hoping to find a witness who might further embellish their testimony as reported in the book, or even recant. In my experience, the passage of time allowed witnesses to relax and, as years passed, they were more likely to admit it if they were wrong. Several of Keel's original witnesses had either moved from the area or had died; but of those we were able to contact by telephone, only one person refused to speak to us.

First, we interviewed those who had witnessed Mothman at close proximity, then those involved with the MIB visits; not one witness swerved from their original account. Statistically, this had to be some sort of record. The deeper our questions got, the more we were convinced that the witness had indeed seen or interacted with something.

One particularly memorable subject, who was up-front about what she had seen, was an older woman who said she had encountered Mothman in her backyard. Her property was close to the boundaries of the TNT area and, hearing a buzzing or humming sound coming from the back of her home, she went out to investigate. It was mid-afternoon, and when she opened the back door she found herself face to face with Mothman, hovering about 10 feet in front of her. Her description was detailed, suggesting something more like a machine than an animal. She had no conscious memory of communicating with the visitor; to the best of her recollection, she simply backed up into the house and closed the door.

This woman was not frightened by what she had seen, in fact she was astonished at her own calmness. On returning to her living room she noticed that the TV show she had been watching prior to hearing the noise in the backyard had ended and the next program was about two-thirds through. More than 25 minutes of time was 'missing'. She returned to the back door and looked out through the window, but the visitor had gone. Her testimony seemed to rule out any kind of nocturnal creature.

Most of the other encounters, however, took place well after sunset. As suggested in Keel's book, the TNT area had become the place for teenagers to go for 'biological experimentation'. In the very first sighting, the terrified witnesses, surprised while parked there, fled back to town at high speed with the Mothman in hot pursuit. Somehow, the creature was able to keep up with the car at nearly 100 mph, according to the witnesses, whose statement to the police is now part of the public record. One older officer, when asked about that report, said that he knew the officer who had written it and swore that he was not the kind of man to put anything in the record that he did not believe happened.

Other witnesses mentioned in the book told of glowing red eyes and a buzzing or humming sound. UFO sightings were even more routine during this period, so common in fact that the local newspaper stopped reporting them on a

Winged, Red-Eyed 'Thing' Chases Point Couples Across Countryside

By MARY HYRE
Point Pleasant Correspondent

POINT PLEASANT — What stands six feet tall, has wings, two big red eyes six inches apart and glides along behind an auto at 100 miles an hour?

Don't know? Well, neither do four Point Pleasant residents who were chased by a weird "man-like thing" Tuesday night.

in the form of a man, about six feet tall with wings on its back.

Becoming frightened, the couples drove away. As they approached a traffic circle near

Meteor Shower Due In Skies Tonight

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — A meteor shower after midnight tonight may produce one of the

Route 62, they said the thing loomed in front of the car again.

Mallette, 20, said they drove toward Point Pleasant on Route 62 at 100 miles an hour, with the strange creature drifting along behind the car.

The couples said the thing seemed to avoid lights. When they turned into the C. C. Lewis farm, the creature was again in front of the car. What appeared to be a large dead dog

NEWS OF THE WEIRD: A clipping from a local newspaper records early Mothman sightings, some of which took place in Point Pleasant's "lovers' lanes" (below).

regular basis. The entire community became desensitised to the phenomenon and spoke matter-of-factly about nightly sightings of UFOs or the latest news on the creature.

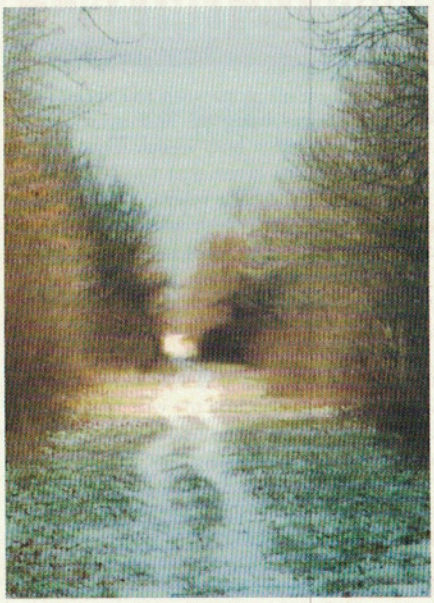
You might expect that frightened residents would avoid the TNT area; the opposite happened. Saturday night in Point Pleasant now had a diversion far superior to the local movie house. Dozens of cars flocked to the site nightly in hopes of catching a glimpse of the red-eyed 'monster from outer space'. If anything, this attests to the widely-held local belief that whatever the UFO was, it was not dangerous. One officer told us that, at times, there were so many sightseers that police officers turned out to direct traffic.

The reaction of residents to the mysterious visitors that followed was not so laid back. The Men in Black were seen and are remembered as truly malevolent individuals, despite their sometimes amusing quirks. More than 10 years after their last visitation, those who had invited the MIBs into their homes still remembered the very real feeling of danger in their presence.

Of course, MIBs were not unique to Point Pleasant; they had been well documented in earlier UFO lore and were being researched. Unlike Mothman, the MIBs sent a shockwave of fear through their contactees. As chronicled by Keel, they arrived in shiny black cars which, like their equally shiny shoes, seemed impervious to the weather.

As the MIBs passed themselves off as 'officials' involved in the UFO investigation, their aura of menace was combined with an absurd fascination for quite mundane objects. Keel's most memorable example is that when offered Jell-O, an MIB saved a sample in a paper napkin, tucking it into his coat. They asked questions about common food items and their speech seemed somehow odd and disjointed. Most importantly, witnesses noticed the MIB had no ears, or seemed to talk without moving their lips. You'd think the witnesses would be

WITNESSES TOLD OF GLOWING RED EYES AND A WEIRD HUMMING SOUND



terrified, having seen such obvious warning signs, but a strange calm prevailed until after the visitors left; only then did people realise how odd, even horrifying, their visitors were.

Were the MIBs just an interesting sideshow to the Mothman tales? Our team conducted interviews, looked for deviations from the original stories and then departed. One witness told us, as we were leaving her home, that she believed the MIBs' veiled threats were very real and that anyone looking seriously into the phenomenon was placing themselves in harm's way. There was little question in my mind that someone or something had toyed with anyone who had directly encountered a UFO.

Eventually, it was time to go back to the TNT area. In fact we made two visits that day, one in daylight and the second late at night. Even in daylight the place was quite surreal. Its domed containment buildings (used for storing the TNT) were stark, looking like rows of igloos. The landscape was criss-crossed by deteriorated roads, their paving broken up by clumps of grass. There were several larger buildings – including a power plant that looks much like Dracula's castle – and other outbuildings, now gutted and crumbling.

Back at camp, we considered several alternatives. Was Mothman a government experiment, a test of the common man's reaction to things otherworldly? Maybe, but in 10 years one might expect to see some of that technology surface in the real world. There were other problems with this scenario, such as where such technology was housed and where the support system could be for such a project. It simply did not seem an appropriate theory in this case; Point Pleasant wasn't Groom Lake!

Perhaps Mothman and his dark kin were mental projections; a mind control experiment of some sort? Theoretically, this kind of project wouldn't require a large support base. Could it be that those visited by MIBs were actually visited by normal humans who then, somehow, planted the image of earless, non-verbal investigators with shiny black shoes in their stead?

As our campfire debate went on under the stars, the group concluded that this was just too far-fetched. We began, slowly, to consider the reality of UFO activity, an area none of us had ever thought likely before coming to Point Pleasant, and with that possibility came a new idea about the reality of the MIBs.

That evening, we went back to take a last look at the TNT area, now a black landscape. We waited two hours; nothing happened – no flashing red lights from radio towers or buzzing

LOREN COLEMAN

BETTMANN/CORBIS

SCARS: The pillars of the Silver Bridge were still visible years after the 1967 disaster.

noises from nearby transformers. Nothing!

One team member recalled the old quote from Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four*: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth." As a group, we were well versed in paranormal activity, but this was not just another ghost story and, try as we might, we could not fit the UFO pegs into any of the paranormal holes we were familiar with. If our goal had been to find the common threads between ghosts, apparitions and UFOs, we had failed. If it had been to find another supposedly 'true story' woven from strands of fiction, that too had failed.

It was not until we returned to New York that we realised we had, indeed, learned something. As the time came to tell our colleagues at PRF that we had failed to find a chink in the Mothman armour, two occurrences convinced us that we could no longer sit on the fence in this case.

MOTHMAN, UFOS, MEN IN BLACK... ALL PART OF AN EXPERIMENT THAT ENDED WITH THE BRIDGE'S COLLAPSE

While it was never my intention to speak out publicly about Mothman, the first of the two occurrences caused me to change my mind. Only two days after returning to New York, my children began to complain that there was something wrong with our telephones. In fact, the next time I went to use one of them, the classic clicks and whirs of a phone tap were evident. Next, the kids reported that they were picking up the phone to hear conversations in progress... and the topic was our family.

While this was interesting, I was not overly concerned until a close friend told me the following story. She had phoned and, according to her account, began having a conversation with me. She swore that it was my voice and that the conversation touched upon things that only she and the immediate family would have known. After about 10 minutes, the voice at the other end stopped her and began to laugh "demonically" as she put it. Then it paused and said in a totally different tone, "Oh, you wanted to talk to Rick. Sorry, I'm here all alone with the children." Whoever it was hung up and my friend's follow-up call got a busy signal. This was a near impossibility, given that the house had four lines, including one reserved for my personal use only; the system would roll over a call if any of the lines being called were busy. The children were indeed at home, alone, and said they had not been using any of the phones.

This one incident was quite enough but, the very next day, a call was made to my home by a man who told my wife that, if she cared at all about her children, she would convince me to drop my interest in UFOs and forget Point Pleasant. Because of the earlier call, we had a device on all of the phones in the house that would give the phone company information on the source of the caller. But when the trace was finally read, the technician said that the call appeared to originate from within my house – a good trick considering my wife was at home alone that day.

A week after this, I was to be a guest on Joel Martin's talk show at WBAB on Long Island. The topic for the evening had nothing to do with UFOs or haunted houses; it was about the defoliant Agent Orange and its use in Vietnam, but when I arrived at the station there had been a change.

Joel met me in the lobby of the station, which was unusual. Usually, his producer would be on hand to get me settled in, with Joel busy up to airtime. But this time, Joel was sitting in the hall with his producer and even before he exchanged the usual greetings, he asked me what I knew about MIBs. I was, to say the least, shaken. He told me that he had been visited by a classic MIB, who cautioned him about doing shows about UFOs. Joel had known about my trip to Point Pleasant and the Mothman story. After some momentary conversation, we agreed that it was time to go public. Whenever a journalist feels he is in danger, the best advice is to put everything he knows before the public in the hope that, once it is public knowledge, there is no reason to threaten the source.

That program went off without a hitch and to the best of my knowledge neither Joel, nor any member of my family, were contacted again. The experience was, however, an eye-opener. Having spent a good part of my life reporting about crime and criminals, including covering the mob families of New York, I had never received any threat to my family apart from this incident. The world of UFOs, I had thought, up to that point, was harmless; just part of the wide range of things that go bump in the night. Now, my mind had been changed.

I also came to believe that *The Mothman Prophecies* was based on very real events and while I still can't buy the tie-in to either Chief Cornstalk or the Silver Bridge disaster, I do think that the reports of UFOs, Mothman and the MIBs were based on truthful accounts by honest people.

So, what do I think really happened in Point Pleasant over those 13 months? I think that someone or something was involved in a complex human experiment. Whether this project originated with the government or an otherworldly source, I cannot say. The UFOs, the cattle mutilations, Mothman and the MIBs were all an orchestrated experiment, which ended when the Silver Bridge collapsed, shaking the community of Point Pleasant profoundly.

I believe the unexpected disaster caused the experimenter to stop the project because the data after the cataclysm would be tainted by the event. That seems to make sense of the argument for some sort of mind projection as well; a subject under the stress of losing a loved one would probably make a poor subject for something like hypnosis. But could a psychic projection mutilate a cow? Was the creature, then, flesh and blood?

With the release of *Mothman* as a major motion picture, it is reasonable to surmise that the production will play with the facts. I can't comment, beyond saying that if you really want to know the whole story, you will have to go back to the source... the original *Mothman Prophecies*.

RICK MORAN is a working journalist who now lives in the suburbs of New York City after a seven-year assignment in Dallas, Texas, and specialises in stories about public safety, politics, American history and archaeology. He is still very interested in researching unexplained phenomena.

JOHN A KEEL: A BIOGRAPHY

DOUG SKINNER PRESENTS A BRIEF LIFE OF KEEL, SUPPLEMENTED WITH AN ESSENTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Alva John Kiehle was born 25 March 1930, in Hornell, New York. His father was a singer and bandleader; his mother a "lively, pretty girl with a strong sense of humor". The marriage didn't last and young John was sent to live with his grandparents; he joined his mother and her new husband on a farm in nearby Perry when he was 10.

Keel's voracious curiosity manifested early; he read everything, particularly science, travel, humour and magic (especially anything about Houdini). When he was 12, he had one of his first brushes with the paranormal – a poltergeist in the attic that responded to his knocking. By the time he was 14, he was renting an office space, writing a column for the *Perry Herald* ('Scraping the Keel'), publishing the school paper (*The Jester*) and contributing to magazines... all while working the family farm. By 16, he was publishing a science-fiction fanzine, *The Lunarite*, and had sold a piece to *The New Yorker*. He had little interest in school.

One day in 1947, he packed a bag and hitch-hiked to Manhattan. He was soon active in Greenwich Village; he edited the magazine *Poets of America*; wrote for the arts weekly *Limelight*; and turned out comic books for *Superman* creator Jerry Siegel, scripts for pioneer TV station WABD, and countless magazine articles and short stories.

In 1951, he was drafted. Fortunately, he was sent not to Korea but Frankfurt, to work for the Armed Forces Network. His programming ideas – a Halloween broadcast from Frankenstein's Castle, for example – earned him a radio job after his service. He was restless, though; so, in 1954, he emptied his bank account and headed for Cairo.

For the next few years, he travelled through the Middle East, supporting himself precariously by articles sent back to the US. He spotted a UFO in Egypt and (possibly) a yeti in Sikkim, interviewed snake charmers, filmed street magicians, and learned the Indian Rope Trick. When he was deported as an 'adventurer' from Singapore, he moved to Barcelona and wrote up his experiences in *Jadoo*.

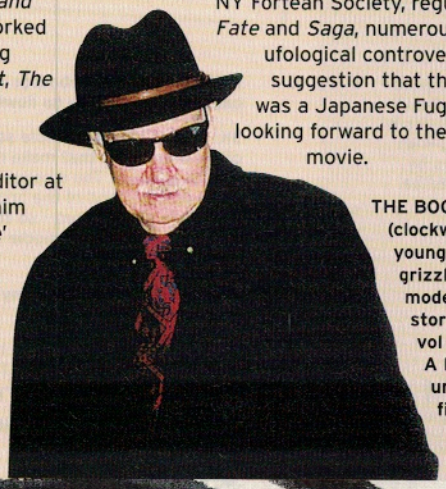
When *Jadoo* was published in 1957, Keel returned to NY and promoted it by charming cobras in a Times Square window. Funk & Wagnall's hired him as science and geography editor, and he landed a syndicated newspaper column. He also re-entered television, providing ad-libs for Merv Griffin, writing for game shows and somehow completing 200 episodes of the slapstick series *Mack and Meyer for Hire*. He also worked in Hollywood, contributing scripts to *Get Smart*, *The Monkees*, *Lost in Space* and other shows.

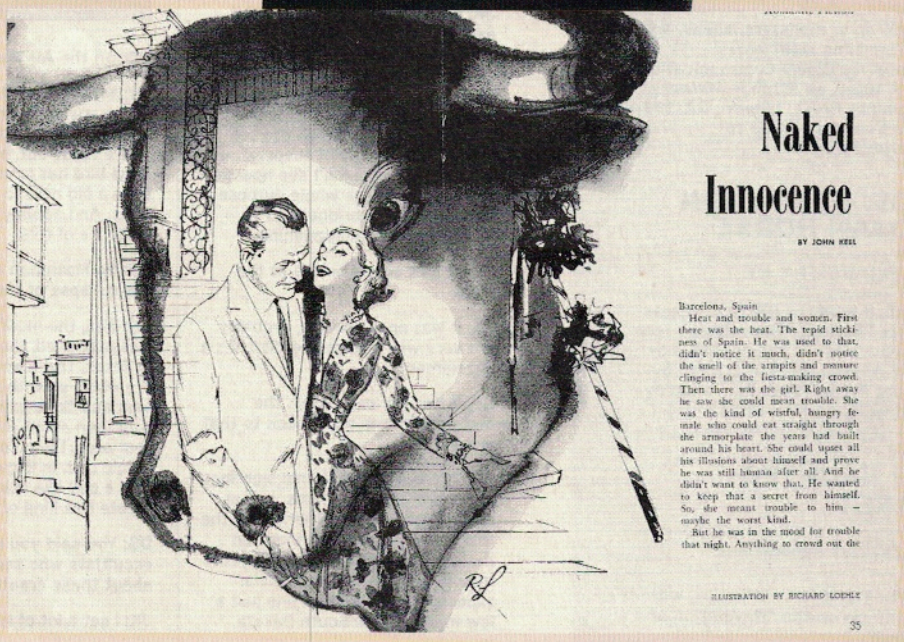
KEEL FOR KING

In 1965, an editor at *Playboy* asked him for the 'definitive' UFO article. For the next few years, Keel pursued the subject, interviewing witnesses and investigating reports across the country. The phenomenon, he learned, was not a passive one. He entered a "shadowy world" where black cars disappeared on country roads, meaningless messages turned up in hotel rooms, and his phone and mail suffered increasingly strange interception. In 1966, he repeatedly visited Point Pleasant, West Virginia, at that time the site of a particularly lively UFO and monster flap; the result was one of his most popular books, *The Mothman Prophecies*.

In the 1970s, he worked for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, as a consultant on government publications. He also earned his license as a private pilot and spent time in Scandinavia investigating phantom subs, mystery holes, and a rash of headless cadavers.

Since then, he has lived in Woodstock and New York City, and continued to contribute to a variety of magazines. His fortean activities include the revival of the dormant NY Fortean Society, regular columns in *Fate* and *Saga*, numerous lectures, and a ufological controversy sparked by his suggestion that the Roswell 'saucer' was a Japanese Fugo balloon. He is looking forward to the new Richard Gere movie.





Naked Innocence

BY JOHN KEEL

Barcelona, Spain

Heat and trouble and women. First there was the heat. The tepid stickiness of Spain. He was used to that, didn't notice it much, didn't notice the smell of the armpits and manure clinging to the fiesta-making crowd. Then there was the girl. Right away he saw she could mean trouble. She was the kind of wistful, hungry female who could eat straight through the armorplate the years had built around his heart. She could upset all his illusions about himself and prove he was still human after all. And he didn't want to know that. He wanted to keep that a secret from himself. So, she meant trouble to him – maybe the worst kind.

But he was in the mood for trouble that night. Anything to crowd out the

ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD LOEHLE

35

THE BOOK OF KEELS: (clockwise from top) The young writer and the grizzled veteran (in MIB mode). A Keel short story from Men's Digest vol 1, no 1, 1957. A button from an unknown science fiction convention.

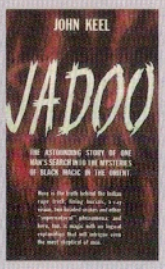
THANKS TO DOUG SKINNER FOR PICTURES

THE KEEL BOOKSHELF

A full bibliography is probably impossible. Keel himself didn't keep records; some of his books were pseudonymous and many were pirated. Here are the highlights, with some scrupulously incomplete notes on reprints and alternate titles.

JADOO

1957, Julian Messner, NY, NY.



"The Astounding Story of One Man's Search into the Mysteries of Black Magic in the Orient." UK edition by WH Allen, 1958. There have been several paperback reprints, often abridged.

THE FICKLE FINGER OF FATE

1966, Fawcett Publications, Greenwich, CN.

"A Camp Classic - For Adults Only!" The adventures of Satyr-Man, with illustrations by *Mad's* Al Jaffee.

STRANGE CREATURES FROM TIME AND SPACE

1970, Fawcett Publications.

A round-up of monsters, aliens, and other "ambling nightmares". Reprinted by Global Communications, NY, NY, 1984, as *Strange Mutants*; by Illuminet Press, Lilburn, GA, 1994, as *The Complete Guide to Mysterious Beings.*

UFOS: OPERATION TROJAN HORSE

1970, Putnam's, NY, NY.

A detailed study of UFOs; suggests they are "material apparitions" controlled by "cosmic jokers". UK edition by Abacus, 1973; reprinted by Illuminet Press, 1996. Reprinted by Manor, 1976, as *Why UFOs?*

OUR HAUNTED PLANET

1971, Fawcett Publications.

On a variety of fortean topics, with an emphasis on the "Revolution of the Mind".

LUNCH WITH KEEL

While JOHN KEEL was recuperating from a series of eye operations, he agreed to meet over lunch for a look back at the strange events in Point Pleasant. Also present were DOUG SKINNER (who recorded and edited the following), DR MAMIE CATON and film-maker GEORGE KUCHAR (who, incidentally, devoted much screen time to Keel in his recent video *Secrets of the Shadow World*). The conversation first turned to the collapse of the Silver Bridge.

DOUG SKINNER

GK: Maybe it was sabotage that caused the bridge to go down.

JK: Well, there are a whole series of circumstances that make it look very suspicious. The stoplights froze at either end of the bridge - they were stuck at red - so the traffic piled up in the middle of the bridge.

DS: But who would have any interest in doing that?

JK: I never figured that out. If I could have figured that out, I would have had a much better story.

DS: And nobody came up with a theory?

JK: No. The FBI wanted to get it explained away as fast as possible... said it was structural failure. But the bridge went down so fast, I don't know how it could be done, unless you crawl under it with a saw and saw away at all the supports. I did a study of suspension bridges, and I couldn't see how this could happen. The whole purpose of a suspension bridge is to *prevent* this from happening.

DS: It was an old bridge at the time.

JK: It was an old bridge, probably not very well maintained. Still, it's a puzzlement.

GK: After the bridge fell, the Mothman never came back to that area?

JK: There *were* additional sightings in the months afterwards. In fact, the wife of a deputy sheriff saw the Mothman. You know, I've gotten thousands of letters over the years from people who've had similar experiences. There was one just a few weeks ago in South Dakota.

THEY DID HAVE A SERIAL KILLER ON THE LOOSE. THEY DIDN'T FIND THE VICTIMS FOR MANY YEARS. THERE WAS A CAVE FULL OF DECAYING BODIES

DS: On the Air Force base?

JK: Yeah, on the Air Force base. There are large bird sightings all over the world. And we can never figure these out, because a very large bird has to eat a lot. It has to have a big nest to raise the little birds. And nobody's ever found any evidence of this.

DS: So Mothman didn't stop with the collapse of the bridge.

JK: Well, the month that the book was published, they had a big flap in Texas. There were schoolteachers who'd seen this thing that they said was like a pterodactyl... huge. And then about five years later, in that area, they discovered a black magic cult, in Brownsville, Texas. And a cult like that could possibly create this kind of hallucination.

DS: You said you got letters from occultists who seemed to know about these creatures.

JK: I get a lot of letters from people who are practising witches. They were familiar with all this... there are certain symptoms.

DS: Was there any cult activity in Point Pleasant?

JK: No. That's one thing I was looking for; maybe somebody who was buying a lot of black candles, some clue like that. They did have a serial killer on the loose. They didn't find the bodies until many years later. They found a cave full of decaying bodies, mostly teenagers he'd picked up, driving along. And they would end up in this cave.

DS: And they never caught him.

JK: Well, there was one guy I met there... who was very insistent that he wanted me to come see his gun collection in his basement. And I kept putting him off. I was very busy... I didn't have time to go look at a gun collection. I thought afterwards, maybe I should have been very suspicious of this guy.

GK: Point Pleasant wasn't so pleasant. It sounds like a horrible Unpleasant Point.

DS: And there hasn't been much activity there since, has there?

JK: No. What happened, prior to the collapse of the bridge, was all this psychic activity. Everywhere I went, I was finding a lot of poltergeist activity. It seemed to go along with the whole thing.

GK: A hotbed of activity... not very good activity.

JK: Well, I've been in other places where there's been a lot of psychic activity. When I look back on it, I've been exposed to a number of poltergeists. Furniture, heavy furniture like a sofa, would lift up and float across the room, nobody moving it.

DS: Did you see this?

JK: I've seen that.

DS: Where?

JK: Probably on Long Island. We had a lot of it on Long Island. I saw heavy ashtrays pick up from the table and float around. I've had incidents where heavy doors, the outer doors in a house, would rip off the hinges. People would hear this immense crash, and come downstairs: "What the hell happened to the door?" And that stuff still goes on, on a worldwide scale. Nobody pays much attention to it anymore.

DS: Well, do you think the Point Pleasant experience changed you

in any way?

JK: It made me more broke.

DS: That's an important change.

JK: I had to keep running back and forth. I didn't have much money. And I was renting cars; I'd run hell out of those rented cars. And I always took a carload of people with me. I took newspapermen, photographers, a guy from the UN that George knows.

GK: He was in one of my pictures... Dan... he was Portuguese... Dan Estrella.

JK: Well, Dan moved back to Portugal and opened a cafe. It went broke or something, and he came back to the States. And then he had a terrible accident.

GK: He wound up in a wheelchair?

JK: I think so.

GK: That's terrible. He was a nice person. Have there been any success stories with any of the people?

JK: No.

DS: Several people died, didn't they?

JK: A lot of people died. Some of the people on the bridge were witnesses to this thing. It's something that we don't publicize, but if you see a red-eyed monster, it usually means you're going to die in six months. I'd never tell that to the witnesses. And very often they would die on the spot where they had seen the demon.

GK: That was like Mr Holiday.

JK: Ted Holiday.

GK: And he had a heart attack on the spot.

JK: Right... he saw a man in black.

DS: I know your life was disrupted a great deal, with all that mail and phone trouble. Did that stop after Point Pleasant?

JK: No. I went on having strange experiences for years afterwards. I was up to my eyeballs in so many weird things. I had a girlfriend who was a ballet dancer. She had sort of a Grecian look to her, a unique look. She and I were coming out of an Automat one day, and a guy suddenly came up to us and took our picture. And then... that was weird enough, to have your picture taken in front of the Automat... then he turned, and he ran away. And she commented to me, "That was the most evil-looking guy!" And he was, there was something very off-centre about him. And he ran like an athlete.

DS: And he took one picture.

JK: He took one picture. Now, move ahead to about four or five years later. I'm getting on a train in Washington, DC. Naturally, I always traveled first class. So, this car I got on had very few people in it, and I went to the end of the car so I could spread out my papers. I was going to spend those three hours working on crap. And this girl came strutting down the aisle. She was a dead ringer for my girlfriend. A dead ringer! And she had the dancer carriage. She asked if she could sit with me... and the train was empty. I thought, "Uh oh, I'm not going to get anything done on this trip." And she was really immaculately groomed. You know, it's one thing for a woman to look nicely groomed. But she looked like some make-up artist had done it. And she had this expensive suit on. And as soon as she sat down, she said, "I'm going to visit my boyfriend. He lives at [address deleted]."

MC: That's creepy.

JK: Well, that's right across the street from me.

MC: I know.

JK: So this was to get a big arousal out of me. I thought, "How should I handle this?" I told her, "Listen, that's a very bad neighbourhood. You should be very careful there." I didn't tell her that that's my neighbourhood, because she obviously already *knew* that. And then she spent the rest of the trip trying to find out what I was doing in Washington. I told her, "Nothing special." This was when I was working at HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare]. When the train pulled into the station, I was going to tell her, "Listen, I'm taking a taxi uptown, do you want to go with me?" And I turned around, and she was gone.

DS: Hmm.

JK: I don't know whether she went to the ladies room and hid there, or what happened. There's a lot more to the story, but that's the basics of it. So she obviously was working for somebody, and they went through a great deal of trouble to set this up.

DS: But who?

JK: Who? Why?

GK: Some kind of organisation?

JK: The government has more than enough money to do stuff like this. Who knows? I've had other incidents of this type. Whoever's doing it, my feeling is they have too much money. Some government organisation has five million dollars a year: "What the hell do we do with this? Let's harass somebody!"

DS: But why would the government be interested in what was happening in Point Pleasant?

JK: Because of the nuclear plant there. And because at that time there was a lot of sabotage going on, and they didn't know who were the good guys and who were the bad guys. A lot of it was related to the Vietnam and the Cold War.

DS: So, do you think they suspected you?

JK: No, I think they suspected me of being connected with it in some way... that I had leads to it.

DS: You were talking with so many people there.

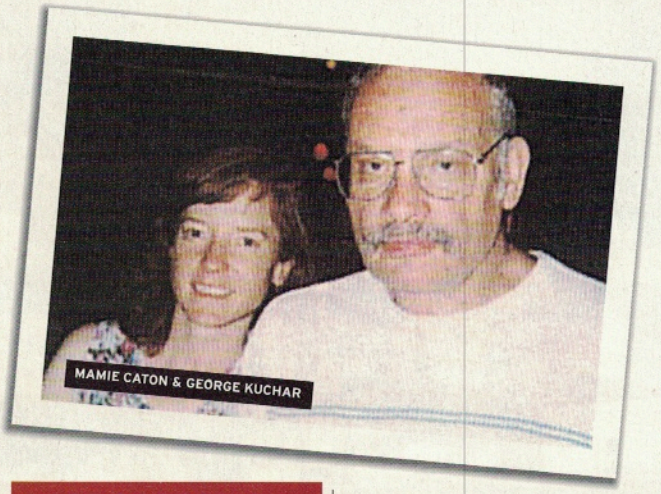
JK: I was talking with people all over the country. And very often, when something weird would happen, John Keel would turn up. The local agents would say, "My God! It's Keel! There he is again!"

DS: So how did you go through the whole Point Pleasant experience without going bananas?

JK: Well, I practically did. And that's one of the focal points of the movie. When it comes out, they'll get three million letters, all from people claiming they've had the same kind of experience. I *still* get those letters.

DS: Any final advice for aspiring monster hunters?

JK: Stay home! By the time you get to the scene, it's all over. I was very lucky... I was on the move, and I was on the scene of a lot of things as they were happening. A lot of things *were* happening at that time. But today, it's all a big gamble. I'm sure there are people rushing to that airport in South Dakota, looking for a feather from the bird. That bird will probably never be seen again.



DOUG SKINNER

A LOT OF PEOPLE DIED ...WITNESSES TO THIS THING. IT'S SOMETHING WE DIDN'T PUBLICISE, BUT IF YOU SEE A RED-EYED MONSTER, IT MEANS YOU'RE GOING TO DIE IN SIX MONTHS.

HOW TO BUILD AN ATOM BOMB IN YOUR BASEMENT AND BECOME THE FIRST KID ON YOUR BLOCK TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD

1973, Lancer Books.

A satire of the arms race.

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES

1975, Saturday Review Press, NY, NY.

What was happening in Point Pleasant, anyway? UK edition by Panther, 1976, as *Visitors From Space*.

THE EIGHTH TOWER

1975, Saturday Review Press.

"The Cosmic Force Behind All Religious, Occult and UFO Phenomena." UK edition by Panther, 1978, as *The Cosmic Question*.

DISNEYLAND OF THE GODS

1988, Amok Press, NY, NY.

"An Investigation Into Psychic Phenomena and the Outer Limits of Human Perception". Drawn mostly from *Saga* columns.

OTHER TITLES INCLUDE

Two Women (a comic novel about the art world); *Kiss My Gun* (on gun control), *Bed of Nails* (another novel); *The Hoodwinkers* (on hoaxers); and *The Short Stories of John A Keel* (a pirated collection). I have no information on dates and publishers. Lost works include: *West of Washington Square* (an early novel, thrown out by an irate landlord); *Pattern for Adventure* (on Mid-East politics); and *Carnival of the Mind* (an overview of cults, left in a taxi by its intended publisher).

Pseudonyms include Harry Gibbs, Randolph Halsey-Quince, and the distinguished Thornton Vaseltarp. Magazine contributions are too numerous to list here; one of the earliest was *Hobo News*, one of the latest *Maxim*. Keel also published a newsletter, *Anomaly*, in the 1970s and reprinted articles as booklets through the NY Fortean Society.

DOUG SKINNER has voiced-over commercials, performed a UFO abduction ventriloquist routine, emerged from a toilet in Crocodile Dundee II and is currently playing in the band White Knuckle Sandwich and editing the papers of pioneer vaudevillian John W Ransome.

INVASION OF TH

John Keel's *The Mothman Prophecies* (1975) – argues **COLIN BENNETT** – stands alongside John Michell's *Flying Saucer Vision* (1967), John Fowles' *The Magus (1965)*, Patrick Harpur's *Daimonic Reality* (1994) and Anthony 'Doc' Shiels' *Monstrum* (1990) as a modern masterpiece that reimagines our place in the world. Such classics point to ancient magical connections between Mind and Landscape, the antithesis of the godless 'objectivity' of a sterile materialist culture.

LOREN COLEMAN

POINT PLEASANT PERSONALITY: The West Virginia town had its own agenda, spoke through simulacra and weather, atmosphere and geology.

The best writers are painters; not content merely to describe, they scorn the base instincts of cloddish objectivity and, as John Keel has done, allow themselves to become part of the investigation itself. Like the characters of Borges and Castaneda, such writers allow themselves to be fooled on occasion in order to hack into the system and let the investigation talk to them. Sometimes this risky participation mystique brings them near to death and madness, as it brought Coleridge and De Quincey and indeed Keel himself. If they survive at all, such shamanic writers bring back wonders, demonstrating that a seeker who takes no risks learns nothing.

In *The Mothman Prophecies*, Keel tells an astonishing tale of how, as a budding UFO researcher in November 1966, he began investigating sightings in Point Pleasant, West Virginia, of an incredible animal form with characteristics of both man and moth. Keel found, as had his friend Ivan Sanderson before him, that the pursuit of a mystery creature – a 'cryptid' – leads very quickly to involvement with the mysteries of a landscape and a community.

Forster's Marabar caves, Hamlet's castle at Elsinore, and Thomas Hardy's Egdon Heath are all aspects of crypto-geographic *personalities*;

THESE LANDSCAPES LIVE AND BREATH, JUST LAKE HUGE ANIMATED FORMS

they live and breathe as huge animated forms and penetrate human awareness the way ivy weaves through an old house. These supra-human forms are quite conscious, aware, and active. In West Virginia, Keel found the local 'system-animal' had its own agenda; it 'spoke' through simulacra and weather, atmosphere and geology, coincidence and dream. Before the coming of Christianity and science, such forms as Keel describes were a fully understood part of an integrated world image that linked Mind to sacred sites, landscape, ideas and evolving culture. They were part of the knitting together of matter and idea, body and soul.

The fairies of ancient tradition did this with the kind of droll humour, grotesque mimicry and conspiratorial fooling experienced not only by Keel, but by many in the community of Point Pleasant. Our relations and dialogues with such forms of spiritual energy were destroyed when we fell first into monotheism and then again into mechanical science. The changing landscape feels and thinks, and when it is hurt it can hit back, producing forms from under the hill that disorient and confuse. They may act in defence against some kind of violation of landscape, often to a destructive purpose.

But what did Connie Carpenter see on Sunday, 27 November 1966, as she passed the deserted greens of the Mason County Golf Course outside of New Haven, West Virginia? According to Connie, it was "shaped like a man, but very much larger. It was at least seven feet tall and very broad." As its large, round, fiercely-glowing eyes fixed upon her with hypnotic effect, the grey figure unfolded a pair of wings 10ft (3m) in span. With these wings hardly moving, it then rose up in the air "like a helicopter" and swooped over her car.

Over 100 people saw this bizarre creature that winter. Point Pleasant was a town with no bars, and a population of some 6,000. Even before the sightings of Mothman and UFOs, Keel tells us of black helicopters, cattle mutilations, and 'zones of fear'. But all these things take a back seat when humanoid or

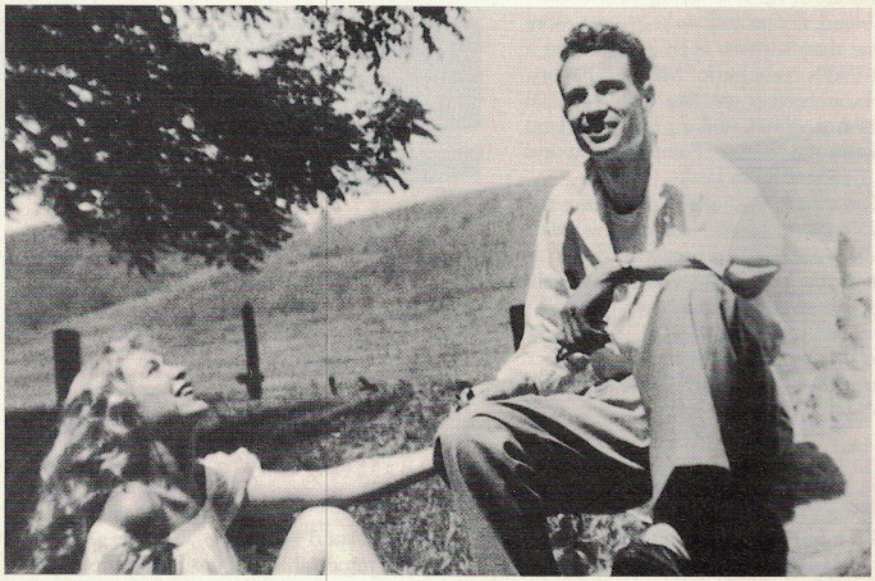
HE DOLL PEOPLE

semi-humanoid forms (such as Mothman) appear. The modern mind's sense of wonder, severely shackled by socially enforced scientific dialectical materialism, has hardly any models for Mothman. Stalking the humble environs of Point Pleasant are vague forms, almost-shapes from ethereal cloud worlds. If ever there was a fortean 'banned' show, it is this one.

The Mothman and his dark-clad ensemble of MIBs mumble codes and bits of strange languages as if in half-sleep. They try to drink jelly, have difficulty with knives and forks, and delight in leaving messages that utterly confuse the UFO witnesses and so-called contactees. They arrive at the homes of witnesses in black saloon cars with untraceable license plates, wearing authentic USAF uniforms, and tell them not to listen to John Keel, should he ever call and ask questions about Mothman… or anything else, for that matter. Some make vague threats to these witnesses, but only as a kind of automated after-thought. Others smell bad, their clothes hang on their very bones, and they wheeze and cough as if seriously ill. Their language and sentence-structure appear to be curiously manufactured, as if by some faulty machine. Their time references are seriously out of date, and all common social and personal sense is fractured in some peculiar way.

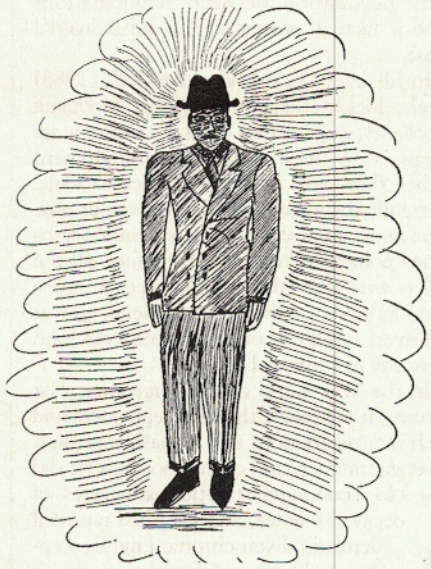
As if this were not enough, the phenomenon followed Keel around. After he returned to Manhattan, some 800 miles (1300 km) from Point Pleasant, the figures that continued to manifest appeared to be part of a linked group, and were intensely agitated by Keel's investigations. It was almost as if his inquiries played a part in bringing them into being. The deeper he dug, the worse the situation became. And of course the telephone system – a classic icon of paranoia – starts talking to itself, selectively ringing and connecting parties in the investigational loop. The postal service becomes equally moody. Like the entities themselves, it is not so much threatening as appearing to undergo the mood changes of a small child.

As word of his investigations spread, Keel becomes a *foco novo* for UFO 'contactees'. They lurch towards him in concert, like the zombies in *Night of the Living Dead*. They find him, wherever he is, and they contact him by all possible means. Most claim that they have a personal message from the UFO occupants for Keel himself. As a result, poor Keel finds himself mentally in the middle of a maze of smashed telephone junctions and early soap and science fiction plots. He does not meet any of the entities directly; the UFO contactees become his listening posts and they relay what the entities have said. Some hear the entities speaking in their minds, and the accuracy of the information given in this manner is often chilling.



FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY

THE MEN IN BLACK MUMBLE CODES AND STRANGE LANGUAGES



FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY

INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE: Howard Menger and wife (above) and the Men in Black who followed in the contactees' wake (below).

Keel has three different systems. He passes questions to the contactees; they relay them to the entities and give Keel the replies. Though Keel makes the questions as complicated as he can, there are quick and correct answers. He posts letters to addresses he knows do not exist, yet gets answers (in block capitals) the very next day. Lastly, he speaks directly to the entities by phone, and the voices on the other end sound to him like those which speak through a medium at a séance.

A single theme unites the vast confusions of the contactees. It is the warning that humanity is about to go through a most profound change involving a new form of control or reprogramming. At that time, 1966, personal computers were almost 20 years in the future, yet it seems as if Keel entered an Internet-like gaming world of many dimensions resembling, perhaps, the classic 1960s British TV series *The Prisoner*. The contactee world echoes his most private thoughts and throws back answers, conclusions, recommendations and not a few jokes.

As a high-tech party trick, this phenomenon could be totally personalised with spectacular physical effects; for instance, Keel picks a motel at random to find mail waiting for him there. If George Adamski and Howard Menger had contacted such a wrecked ship of mad fools and cadaverous actors as Keel describes, they might well have been victims of similar confusions some 15 years before Keel experienced them. But the clever and analytic Keel – perhaps sharper than Adamski and Menger (bless them!) – noted "that as soon as my attitude towards a game changed, the entities switched to a new game".

As Keel describes it, the whole State of

Ohio suffered what can only be described as an invasion of 'dolls'. Just one of the curious things about these figures is that, more than anything else, they remind us of the Media. Keel's living cartoons scream, gurgle, and generally camp it up, as if a laboratory full of half-completed media 'personalities' had been freed by some doll-liberation society. As human imitations, his communicating entities – Indrid Cold, Klinell, Mr Apol, and Lia – are bland, floppy and androgynous, more comic than sinister. Seen as figures in a late-1960s prophetic Media allegory, Keel's grotesques are like early Michael Jackson seedlings, stalking the borderland between the 'factual' Point Pleasant and the 'fictional' Twin Peaks.

Keel's book was indeed prophetic; the new 'control system' emerged as Mass Media, which is essentially a 'doll culture'. Our media 'personalities' behave much like those observed entities. More than 30 years later, we now know what Keel's idea of 'reprogramming' really aimed to do… to destroy the OFF switch. We are all Americans now, whether we like it or not.

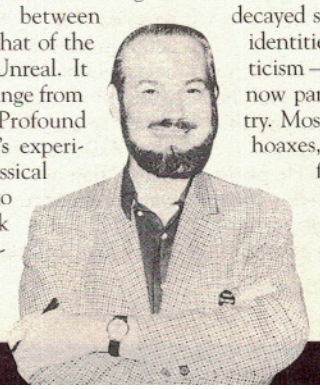
CORBIS

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT: Each killer was a Pandora's Box of conspiracies.

Alien 'invasion' may, in fact, have taken just such a subtle form, its flying discs mere props from some abandoned rehearsal. In this, popular culture has proved itself to be a more complex thing than mere peasant-control. It is an entire universe full of very complex communications, far more significant and powerful than pre-industrial 'fact'; the 'product' is a state of mind, not an industrial artefact. Perhaps after all, the 'trip' experiences of the 1960s taught us one important thing: that time itself is linked essentially to change of metaphor.

If the entities we meet in *The Mothman Prophecies* are 'built' of anything it is metaphorical suggestion-concentrate – Media plasma. This means that 'contact' is much more likely to resemble a software gaming experience than anything to do with the equations of the Industrial Revolution. Since human consciousness is built of advertisements, we should not be surprised that the virtual event – such as the Y2K concern, the Gulf War and the hunt for Osama Bin Laden – has come to dominate. An advanced alien culture may have abandoned our crude concepts of industrial solidity altogether in favour of slivers of powerful suggestion-stuff with 'performance' replacing crude 'reality'. But of one thing we can be sure – consciousness of any kind will contain elements of corruption and madness, failure and despair, and perhaps even love and inspiration.

But if – as *The Mothman Prophecies* implies – the spirits of hill and dale are laughing at us, it would make for a much more interesting and fruitful interaction between Humanity and Nature than that of the simple-minded Real versus Unreal. It would also be a refreshing change from the Holy, Sober, and Profound Christian view. To put Keel's experience in the very best of Classical perspectives, we might have to return to the ancient Greek view that the truth is scandalous beyond all belief, and the gods are neither respectable nor sensible entities at all.



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ASSASSINATIONS ARE MORE ABOUT SHOW BUSINESS THAN POLITICS

Of course, those afflicted with the 'real' will want to know whether *The Mothman Prophecies* is fact or fiction. Composed over 30 years ago, it was prophetic in its suggestion that the then prevailing model of Mind – as a hard-wired Pavlovian/behaviourist 'information processing' machine (relying on a far too easy separation of facts and fictions) – was doomed. Keel himself suggests that the software of image and advertisement is a much better model for the thinking process, and that related mental activity is more like a fuzzy negotiation between hallucinations than a 'factual' process in the old industrial sense.

In his later *Disneyland of the Gods* (1988) Keel, looking back on *The Mothman Prophecies*, suggests that mental operations are organised by the metaphor of entertainment rather than any structure of factual logic. Certainly the major assassinations of our time were more about show business than old-fashioned politics. Like Keel's grotesques, all the killers were show-dolls of a kind, each one a Pandora's box of living conspiracies, just as was every single one of the victims, from John Kennedy to Princess Diana.

In the Web-world of the burgeoning 21st century, it is possible that such ephemera and such semi-realisations will unleash treachery, revenge, murder, and destruction just as did the old economies, politics, structures of decayed science, and vanished national identities. Even chronic English scepticism – like the science it supports – is now part of the entertainment industry. Most sceptical claims are counter-hoaxes, different aspects of the same fortean joke that made Keel's Point Pleasant the factual version of the later fictional TV series *Twin Peaks*. In a fortean world, fact and fiction are versions of one another. In every British city and town there are alchemical temples manned by celibate witch doctors; this organization is called the Catholic Church and, as Jung reminds us, the Mass is an alchemical ceremony with roots deep in ancient occultism. Brought up to date, a change of paradigm means a change of media. In this sense, the patently incomplete nature of Keel's aliens means that they are neither real nor unreal so much as being 'under construction'.

In the fortean sense, scientific objectivity has 'banned' our recognition of any participants in our conscious life other than fellow humans. Shakespeare shows that there are unnamed *dramatis personae* implicit in the human situation, showing that humans are not lords of creation but part of an evolving chain of being, shading from 'solid' to almost nothing. This chain consists of animal, vegetable and mineral domains, all of which have dynamic anthropomorphic elements that we ignore at our peril. Like Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, *The Mothman Prophecies* depicts humans as poised between the animal kingdoms and the realms of the gods. When the transport to and from Middle-Earth breaks down, many domains above and below hit back, throwing off man-made structures. In this sense, Hardy's Egdon Heath is as much responsible for the death of Eustacia Vye as Keel's mysterious beings are for the collapse of the bridge at Point Pleasant and the deaths of 38 people. The Greek Tragedians understood completely such connections between environment and social character, motivation and supra-human agendas. Meantime, fallen moderns grate their teeth on the mechanical, and wonder that they cannot explain events in Dallas 1963, the assassination of Princess Diana, or the murder of little Jon Bennet.

Back in New York for Christmas 1966, the horns of Elfland still sounding in his head (as they did for Coleridge and Blake), Keel, too, is nearly done for. Like many who return from the magic landscape of Magonia, Keel, as wounded initiate, is sick and exhausted. Occult initiation is always a near-death experience. When he hears the news of the collapse of the Point Pleasant bridge on TV, he knows that his West Virginian wounds will be there for a lifetime, reminders of time present and time past, arrival and departure. Finally, John Keel decided that human beings do not solve mysteries so much as decide which set of answers they can most comfortably live with. In showing how he reached this decision, he created a true 20th-century sonata form in *The Mothman Prophecies*.

COLIN BENNETT has been a musician, a mercenary, a dramatist and an electronics engineer. He has published two novels, and is a regular contributor to *FT*. His latest book, *Looking for Orthon*, about George Adamski, has just been published by Paraview Press.

KEEL VS UFOLOGY

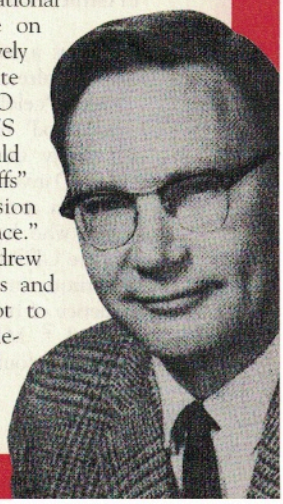
John Keel's theory of ultraterrestrials, who toy with our perceptions of reality and our very existence, is a grand and essentially religious invention; how seriously should we take it? **JEROME CLARK** reviews his relationship with Keel and critically assesses the impact of his ideas as expressed in *The Mothman Prophecies*.

On 17 March 1969, John A Keel, occult journalist, composed a three-page letter to James E McDonald (bottom right), atmospheric physicist. Except for their mutual fascination with the UFO phenomenon and their outsized personalities, it would be difficult to imagine two men less alike. Between them they personified the extremes of ufology in the 1960s.

Keel – addressing himself almost exclusively to radical ufologists and forteans itching for an exciting alternative to the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) – harked back to the 1940s, to Richard S Shaver and N Meade Layne and, even earlier, to classical demonology and supernatural folk belief. McDonald – allying himself with the most conservative ufologists and speaking to his fellow scientists and to elite institutions possessing the wherewithal to fund UFO research and to overcome entrenched resistance to the phenomenon – sought to drag ufology out of its marginality and to transform it into a branch of normal science. Barely more than two years later, McDonald would be dead by his own hand, and Keel would live on to write *The Mothman Prophecies* and other books and to remain an active presence into the 1980s and an enduring influence even now.

It can be fairly said that if McDonald wanted to domesticate UFOs and place them in the mainstream, Keel preferred them so wild and woolly that the ETH would pale into banality by comparison. The whole structure of post-Enlightenment civilisation itself would collapse before Keel's shape-changing 'ultraterrestrials' – demons with a fancy new moniker – became a generally recognised species. In Keel's view, McDonald – an accomplished and (at least until he took up UFO advocacy) well-regarded member of the University of Arizona's Institute of Atmospheric Physics – needed educating, and not just about the supernatural reality underlying UFOs and allegedly-related manifestations: poltergeists, fairies, Sasquatch, Republicans, in short just about anything else not immediately explainable. Keel, using a rhetorical technique that over the years would become wearily familiar, told McDonald that he suffered from a "regretable [sic] emotionalism… apparent in many of your public statements."

Moreover, Keel observed: "You often tend to substitute speculation for facts." McDonald was associating with the wrong people, for example NICAP ufologists [National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, a relatively cautious, pro-ETH private group headed by UFO author and retired US Marine Corps Major Donald E Keyhoe]. These were "buffs" who "adopted a conclusion before they had any evidence." Keel, on the other hand, drew on "extensive field studies and personal experiences," not to mention the "valid, independent studies" he had



MC DONALD COURTESY OF FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY

conducted "outside the buffery's sphere of influence." Among other things, he had established conclusively that "known poltergeist cases and known UFO waves… correlate precisely with each other," thus substantiating his own theory that "the poltergeist phenomenon is a UFO effect."

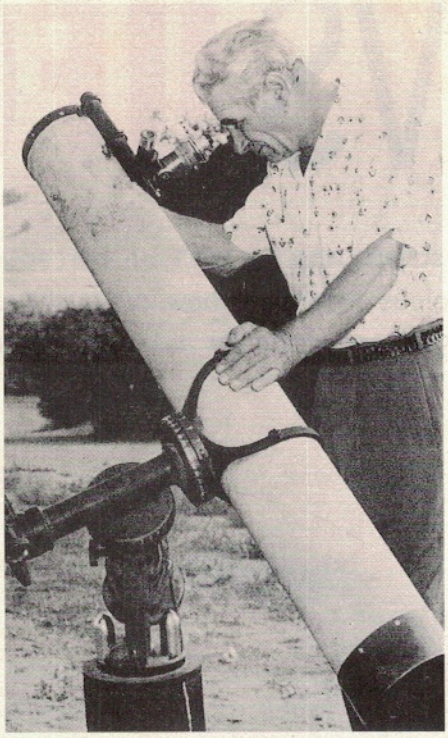
Keel declared that his comprehensive study of all religious traditions proved divine miracles and UFO contacts to be identical at their root. No specifics accompanied these assertions, though he did urge McDonald to look up recent Keel articles in such august journals as the pulp cheesecake-and-adventure magazine *Male*, and in Ray Palmer's pulp Hollow Earth-championing *Flying Saucers*. On the last of his three pages, he mentioned West Virginia contactee Woodrow Derenberger [see this issue page**], who had been given "a completely clean bill of health" by "highly qualified psychiatrists". Even more revealingly, "one of the doctors involved experienced direct contact himself!"

McDonald's restrained response, written on 24 March, observes mildly that "you're not in a particularly strong position to criticise someone like myself for speculating on the UFO problem. I might tick off, but won't take time to, a pretty long list of your own speculations that are not well supported in your writings... As a matter of fact, it is not your own speculations that I find disquieting, but your practiced style of writing as if you had some deep insights into baffling mysteries that no one else has plumbed."

Writing back with a long letter dated 2 April, Keel portrayed himself as the one man who had broken through "all the buffery myths and nonsense" and conducted not just the field work but the statistical and scientific studies others – such as McDonald, who had only "emotional involvement" or NICAP's "obsessive-compulsive paranoid schizophrenics" – had not even thought to try, and found a "definite conclusion based upon hard facts… The UFOs are transmogrifications... The UFO entities are… variations on the age-old 'elemental' types."

In a much shorter reply, McDonald refused to rise to the bait, remarking that Keel simply was not making himself clear. When he talked about "transmogrifications" and "age-old elemental phenomena", he wrote, "I simply do not understand you… You just spin one mystery inside another and never get anything across in any concrete terms." In a note to himself – McDonald was a compulsive note-taker – he wrote that he was disinclined to engage in further correspondence.

It was a wise decision. Keel had already declared that the "celebrated 'scientific method' has proven to be totally unworkable" where UFO investigation and interpretation were concerned. [1] Those who have had access to McDonald's massive UFO files – housed at the University of Arizona in Tucson – have seen abundant evidence of his commitment to the scientific method. [2] McDonald, alas, merely a passive observer, could only interview witnesses, weigh testimony, study radar records, consider alternative explanations for sightings, and all the rest. Keel, on the other hand, could "actually control UFO events." Once, Keel claimed, he had conjured up the notion of "gill-men" and, *not long afterwards* – according to Keel anyway – *someone actually encountered a gill-man*. Who, where, or when Keel never let on.



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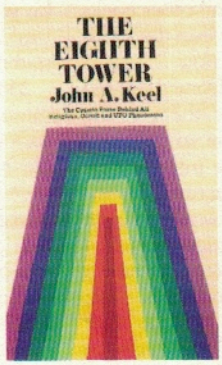
Contactees like Adamski (left) could be seen as forerunners of Keel, whose *The Eighth Tower* (below) claimed that the mysteries of religion and UFOs were, at root, one and the same.

A REINCARNATED ADAMSKI RETURNED VIA SPACECRAFT TO RURAL DEVONSHIRE

If you believe John Keel you also believe this: supernatural gods (ultraterrestrials, hereafter UTs) once ruled directly over the Earth but then returned to their abode, the superspectrum (the "upper reaches of the electro-magnetic spectrum"), after human beings began to populate the planet. Displeased with the intrusion, the UTs engaged in protracted conflict with *Homo sapiens* in an effort to resolve this territorial dispute. (Keel does not explain why such presumably superior entities would have to wage the dispute over thousands of years.) The UTs also battled each other, and one group assumed human form so that it could more easily communicate with the Neanderthals, whom it sought to enlist in its "physical army". The unintended result was sexual intercourse and the creation of the human race as we know it. [3] "This produced strange responses in the materialised nervous system [of the offspring]," Keel wrote. "Emotions were born. Frequencies were changed. The direct control of the superintelligence was driven from their bodies. They were trapped on Earth, unable to ascend the electromagnetic scale and re-enter their etheric world. With the loss of control, they became animals, albeit highly intelligent animals." [4]



According to Keel, humanity's long interaction with the supernatural, as well as the timely intervention of enigmatic, unearthly strangers in the lives of historical personages such as Thomas Jefferson and Malcolm X, testifies to the continuing presence of the gods of old – including God – who dwell in the superspectrum. Its manifestations include UFOs and their occupants, monsters, demons, angels, poltergeists, ghosts, and voices in the head. "The Devil's emissaries of yesterday have been replaced by the mysterious 'men in black'" he states. "The quasi-angels of Biblical times have become magnificent spacemen. The demons, devils, and false angels were recognized as liars and plunderers by early man. The same impostors now appear as long-haired Venusians." [5]

Thus you swallow all but the benign slant of testimony from such notorious characters as George Adamski, Howard Menger, Aladino Felix (aka Dino Kraspedon), and Ernest Arthur Bryant (of the notorious Scoriton episode, in which a reincarnated Adamski returned via spacecraft to rural Devonshire)… all contactees of the 1950s and 1960s, and all of them with (at least to other observers) very serious credibility problems. [6] And then there's the already-mentioned Woodrow Derenberger and, alongside him, Thomas F Monteleone.

From November 1966 until he dropped out of sight a few years later, Derenberger, a sewing-machine salesman, challenged the credulity of even the most slack-jawed with his ever more expansive fables of interactions with space people and of jaunts to their home planet, Lanulos ("near the Ganymede star cluster" [7] Given conservative ufology's antipathy to contactees, NICAP's Pittsburgh Subcommittee led a remarkably vigorous, open-minded field investigation into Derenberger's early claims as they were occurring – or, more accurately, evolving – until it arrived at the only conclusion possible: that Derenberger's yarns owed everything to human invention, nothing to extraterrestrial intervention. A local psychologist drawn into the probe – the one who, Keel told McDonald, "experienced direct contact himself!" – suffered something of a breakdown, seeing saucers invisible to other family members, meanwhile channelling failed prophecies.

Derenberger's tall tales figure largely in *The Mothman Prophecies*. Keel, who spent time with Derenberger, rejects any notion that the man was just making it up as he went along. He also cites as supporting evidence the adventures of a University of Maryland student, Tom Monteleone, who claimed also to have met nude denizens of Lanulos. Monteleone surfaced after he called a Washington, DC, radio station on which Derenberger was appearing. As Keel writes in *Mothman*, "Even Woody was surprised by such direct confirmation of his own experiences."

HAPPY NUDISTS FROM OUTER SPACE

DOUG SKINNER recalls one of the minor characters of the Mothman saga.

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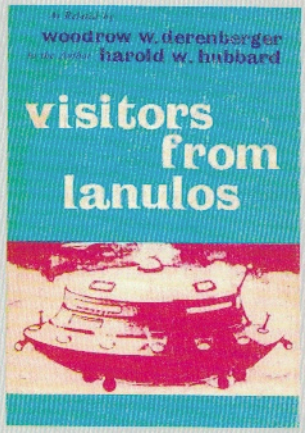
One of the more memorable characters in *The Mothman Prophecies* is Woodrow W Derenberger, a sewing-machine salesman from Parkersburg, West Virginia, who met that dapper ufonaut, Indrid Cold. Even more of his adventures can be found in his own book, *Visitors from Lanulos* (Vantage Press, 1971, "as related to Harold Hubbard", and with a foreword by Keel).

This fanciful tale – even by contactee standards – began on 2 November 1966, when Derenberger encountered a spaceship shaped like a "kerosene lamp chimney." A man climbed out and chatted telepathically with him, keeping a grin on his face and his hands in his armpits; he said he was Mr Cold from the planet Lanulos and that Derenberger should notify the authorities. Derenberger complied, leading to a round of radio and television appearances, harassment from neighbours and five days of interrogation by "Charley, the head man of NASA".

His first contact with Cold led, inevitably, to more. Cold taught him about the Inter-Galactic Circle and took him to Lanulos, an idyllic planet of devout nudists who "live together with love and understanding" in atomic-powered "Gatherings". There, all food is organic, the coffee is decaffeinated, and money is unknown. Lanulosians ride in "air cars" and use an "Intergalactic Alphabet". They enjoy baseball, but with a flat bat and bigger ball.

He met other aliens as well, including Demo Hassan of Cerabus, and Jitro and Elvane Cletaw of Venus. The Cletaws gave him a tour of Venus; everyone there was "friendly and happy" and, again, wore no clothing. He devotes one chapter to his wife's experiences (Cold introduced himself as a vacuum cleaner salesman), and another to the 'Humanoids' who have feathers for hair and ride in pink spaceships.



What are we to make of all this? As in much contactee literature, the claims are so silly as to be somewhat disturbing. Also, there is more than a hint of witchcraft in an initiatory figure named Cold who takes us off to sky-clad gatherings. And is Lanulos just a simple anagram for 'Luna-Sol'?

Given the concentrated weirdness of this flap – including other UFO sightings on 2 November 1966 – maybe Derenberger did have some strange experiences. Maybe his tales grew funnier in the telling. He continued to lecture at UFO conferences and to offer to introduce people to Mr Cold. He is now sunbathing in the hereafter.

After meeting him personally, Keel determined that Monteleone was privy to subtle details that only true UT encounterers would know; thus, "I finally had to conclude Tom was on the level."

Except he wasn't. Monteleone was a psychology major – that alone ought to have raised a Keelian eyebrow – and an aspiring (and later successful) science-fiction writer. He had conjured up the story as a hoax on a hoaxer. Writing in the May 1979 issue of *Omni*, he crowed: "I contradicted Mr Derenberger's story on purpose, claiming to have seen totally different things on my visit to Lanulos. But on each occasion, he would give ground, make up a hasty explanation and, in the end, corroborate my own falsifications. He even claimed to know personally the 'UFOnaut' who contacted me!" [8]

When these revelations saw print [9], Keel did not graciously concede that all those conservative ufologists – "buffs" and "cultists" in Keelian – had been right all along. Keel insisted that not only had he known Monteleone was lying from the start, but that anybody who read what he had written on the subject could see that. [10] Well, not so! On the contrary, Keel had been so wowed by Monteleone's Lanulosian friend Vadig's customary farewell "I'll see you in time!" that he cited it as evidence that UFOs "come from outside our time frame and [Keel's italics] *from outside the environment of the known universe*." [11]

IT'S CLEAR THAT KEEL DOESN'T USE THE WORD 'HOAX' AS THE REST OF US DO

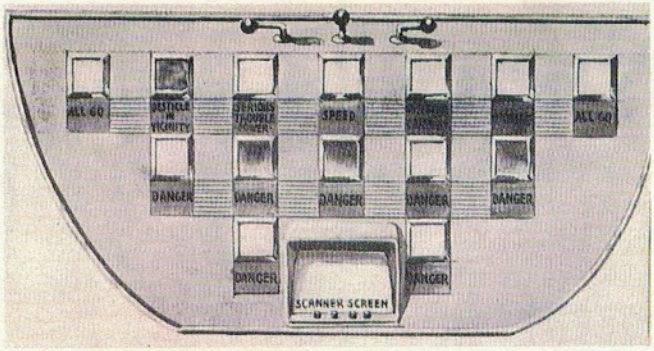
It should be stressed that Keel does not always use the word "hoax" as the rest of us do, to denote humans fooling, or attempting to fool, other humans. In Keelian, hoaxing more often represents what UTs do to us. Since UTs are virtually all powerful, they can represent themselves as just about anything. Consequently, even the most manifestly preposterous encounter claims are real paranormal events, even if not what they seem to witnesses. Thus, Adamski and Derenberger are telling the truth as they saw it; thus, too, the "airship inventors" of 1896-7 were disguised UTs (even though practically every sober investigator of the airship period has deduced that such figures did not exist outside the fictions of journalist-pranksters). Thus, anything – and I mean *anything* – goes.

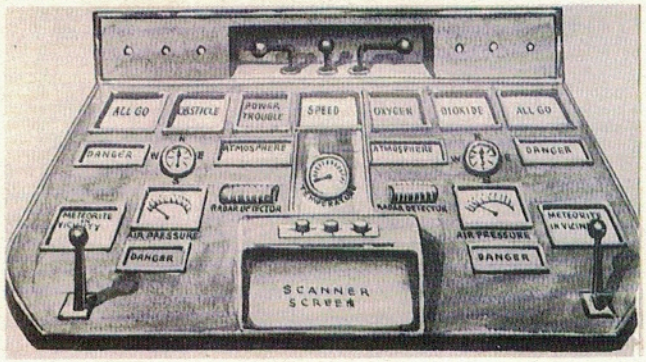
HOAXER: Thomas Monteleone, who was a frequent visitor to Lanulos.

I have to declare that I have a personal history with Keel, whom I have known since – if memory serves – early 1967, when Charles Bowen (then editor of *Flying Saucer Review*) brought us together. We entered into correspondence. I was young, impressionable, modestly read, uncritically minded, and – in the fashion of the period – susceptible to paranoia. In *Forbidden Science: Journals 1957-1969* (1992) Jacques Valleé records the following entry under 3 April 1969: "Don [Hanlon] believes that Jerome Clark, a young ufologist from Chicago [sic], [12] has become so convinced that an extraterrestrial [sic] invasion was imminent that he has been driven close to a breakdown."

Well, not quite! In April 1969, I was more upset about a break-up with a girlfriend than about invading UTs… but it is certainly true that I suffered both an unhealthy degree of fright and an overblown imagination. I was hardly alone. Earlier, in December 1967, I had

SET THE CONTROLS FOR THE HEART OF THE SUN: Control panels from Lanulosian spacecraft.





visited Keel at his Manhattan apartment, where he and a young couple caught up in the excitement were trying on gas masks, anticipating an imminent UT strike on New York City. Reading the correspondence I had with Keel and others back then, I can only cringe at the youthful folly painfully in evidence. At least, I suppose I could say in my defence, I had the excuse of being rather younger than Keel.

In any event, I grew up, and away from Keel, though he had, once, confided his hope that, one day, I would be the next generation's John A Keel. I had thought the parting was amicable, but I was wrong. As late as the 1990s – long after our personal interaction consisted of no more than the rare pleasant note and the even rarer crossing of paths – he was madly spreading slanders about the lapsed Keelist Jerome Clark. When at last I confronted Keel on the matter, he replied that he was only pointing out the obvious, which is that I live in a world of "paranoid conspiracies and illiterate misconceptions... To curb this you may need extensive psychotherapy, coupled with drug treatment... You are ill and have been haunted by this illness all your life." And so on. In short, the usual charming way of dispatching critics: they say those things because they're crazy, in the most clinical sense of the adjective. For good measure, he added the (to me, amusing) observation that I "have fallen for hoax after hoax." [13]]

None of this matters much, and my annoyance over this strange little episode passed quickly. Still, besides demonstrating Keel's often-shown preference for vituperation over reasoned discourse, it underscores his crankiness, in both senses of the word. It's not that Keel will tolerate fools; it's *colleagues* he objects to. Come to think of it, why – given his mediæval-demonologist outlook, his relentless credulity, his charm-challenged anti-intellectualism and, well, his bad manners – would anybody *want* to be a colleague of Keel's?

THERE ARE CHUNKS OF MOTHMAN NO HUMAN WOULD TAKE SERIOUSLY

Contrary to general impression – which is wont to credit Keel with a more creative imagination than he in fact has – he is not a particularly original thinker. His mentor Meade Layne – founder of the occultish (the uncharitable would say crackpotish) *Borderland Sciences Research Associates* – got many of his ideas from medium Mark Probert, who channelled teachings from, among others, a 500,000-year-old Tibetan. [14] If this is your idea of a reliable source of information, God bless you. Layne, I might mention, thought the "etherians" – UTs – were a generally benign lot. It was Trevor James Constable, another student of Layne's, who first discerned the dark reality beneath the sunny exterior: "The 'spacemen' finally begin to emerge as coteries of unethical invisibles, exerting a psychic despotism over innocent and well-meaning people." [15]

But Keel has been more widely read, and it is largely through him that ufologists and forteans, or at least some of them, have plunged into the thickets of occultism and obscurantism… into a realm where words like "elemental" and "superspectrum" and "ultraterrestrial" and "transmogrification" are actually supposed to *mean* something.[16] Into, in other words, a domain of incoherent "theory" and dubious "data" and, finally, numbing irrelevance.

If Keel were a humourist like Charles Fort, rather than a windmill-tilter like Tiffany Thayer [17], one could smile and shrug it off as an ongoing, offbeat joke. No fortean, to my knowledge, has ever championed Fort's sky islands or Ambrose-collectors, knowing that Fort wasn't championing them, either. But Keel is deadly, gloomily, blusteringly, spittle-spewingly in earnest. Though usually politer and calmer about it, so are the legions of acolytes who since then have dropped a ton of Keelist doctrine on all our heads.

Let me close, however, on a mostly positive note. To the best of my recollection, I have been in Keel's company three times… possibly four. Even with that limited exposure, I think I can safely testify that there are few more entertaining dinner companions. Though it's hardly something one would infer from his writing (public or private), in restaurants he has a dazzling and wicked sense of humour. I also think *Mothman Prophecies* is a hugely entertaining book, even if there are whole chunks of it that no sensible human would take seriously for a nanosecond. I hope that the movie based on it is a huge success and that Keel makes a ton of money from it. He deserves to retire in peace.

JEROME CLARK is widely regarded as one of the foremost historians of ufology and his 1992 *UFO Encyclopedia* still stands as major feat of modern scholarship. He has been an editor of *Fate Magazine*, and vice-president of the J Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies and has written a number of highly-regarded books on ufological and fortean subjects.

NOTES

1. "A New Approach to UFO Witnesses", *Flying Saucer Review* (May/June 1968).

2. As well as McDonald's correspondence with a dizzying range of UFO personalities, from the sane to the certifiable.

3. It is surely pointless to mention here that no living physical anthropologist believes that Neanderthals were the ancestors of *Homo sapiens*.

4. *Our Haunted Planet* (Fawcett Publications, 1971).

5. *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* (GP Putnam, 1970).

6. Keel's explanation for the rejection of claims like these by conservative ufologists is characteristically *ad hominem*. In "The Flying Saucer Subculture", *Journal of Popular Culture*, no. 8 (1975), he writes: "Interestingly, the hard-core believer [sic]... tends to be over-skeptical... and has an extremely suspicious nature, perhaps because he/she has created an imaginary self-image and constructed the necessary lies to maintain it. Thus they tend to believe that everyone else shares these personality flaws. They often project or transfer their own problems to the UFO witnesses they interview, and many sincere percipients and contactees have been branded liars by UFO enthusiasts who thought they detected their own behavioral problems in them."

7. Ganymede, of course, is usually thought to be a moon of Jupiter.

8. Monteleone has his own credibility problems. The *Omni* confession, devoted chiefly to the ridicule of those foolish enough to believe him, gives the impression that his role as hoaxer was brief and limited. In fact, as late as January 1970, he was making public appearances. In an 11 August 1970 letter to Keel, he stated that "the experiences I had with Vadiq [his contact from Lanulos] were completely true." This was, of course, long after he had made whatever point he originally intended to make.

9. Not only in *Omni*, but also in a better (and more restrained) piece by Karl T Pflock; see "Anatomy of a UFO Hoax", *Fate* (Nov 1980).

10. For example, see Mark Opsasnick's amusing account in *Strange Magazine* (Spring 1995). Confronting Keel on his curious assertion that he'd always known Monteleone "was a fraud," Opsasnick asked, reasonably enough, why, knowing as much, Keel had still chosen to present it in *The Mothman Prophecies*. Keel snapped: "The chapter is about hoaxes! Read the whole chapter! Don't read one sentence! The whole book says it's all a crock of shit!" Opsasnick notes: "I decided to leave it at that. I reread the chapter... It is not about hoaxes. I could only hope that Keel's statement 'the published word doesn't mean anything' applies only to this chapter."

11. "The Time Cycle Factor", *Flying Saucer Review* (May/June 1969).

12. If it matters, I was living in Moorhead, Minnesota, at the time.

13. Letter dated 27 March 1996.

14. See, for example, Layne's "Mark Probert, Baffling San Diego Medium", *Fate* (May 1949).

15. "Scientists, Contactees and Equilibrium", *Flying Saucer Review* (Jan/Feb 1960).

16. As veteran ufologist Richard Hall once wittily observed (*MUFON UFO Journal*, Aug 1977), for all the meaning terms such as these - and 'extra-dimensional', 'psychical', 'Magonia', and the like - bear, one "might as well say that UFOs emanate from the chronosynclastic infindibulum."

17. The late James Blish once wrote of Thayer, founder of the Fortean Society, that he advocated almost every imaginable crazy belief. "At bottom," added Blish, "every one of these beliefs... turned out to rest on some form of personal devil theory." Cited in Damon Knight's *Charles Fort: Prophet of the Unexplained* (Doubleday and Company, 1970).

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* Names have been changed for reasons of privacy.
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Surname:

First Name:

Address:

Post Code:

Tel No:

E-mail:

Marital Status:

❒ Single ❒ Divorced
❒ Widowed ❒ Separated

Age: Height:

Occupation

Religion:

Build: Attractiveness:

❒ Slight ❒ V. Attractive
❒ Medium ❒ Attractive
❒ Large ❒ Average

Your Personality

tick which traits closely describe you

❒ Affectionate ❒ Fashionable
❒ Serious ❒ Practical
❒ Considerate ❒ Conventional
❒ Shy ❒ Reliable
❒ Romantic ❒ Adventurous

Your interests

Please tick for a liking, cross for a dislike or leave blank for no pref.

❒ Wining/Dining ❒ Jazz/Folk music
❒ Pubs ❒ Classical music
❒ Sports/Keep fit ❒ Theatre/Arts
❒ Politics/History ❒ Watching TV
❒ Reading ❒ Smoking
❒ Travelling ❒ Mixing with friends
❒ Science/Tech ❒ Children
❒ Cinema ❒ Homemaking
❒ Pets/Animals ❒ Gardening
❒ Pop music ❒ Countryside

Your Attitudes

tick for yes, cross for no or leave blank if you don't feel strongly

❒ I prefer town life
❒ I involve myself in community activities
❒ I have many friends of my own sex
❒ I am interested in current affairs
❒ I am looking for one special relationship
❒ I like team activities
❒ My work makes it difficult to meet new people
❒ I want to extend my social life as well as finding a special relationship

Your Ideal Partner

Min. age: Max. age:

Height: min. max.

❒ Don't mind

Marital Status:

❒ Single ❒ Divorced
❒ Widowed ❒ Separated
❒ Don't mind

Build: Attractiveness:

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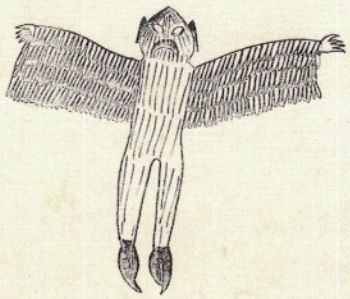
THE OWLING

Veteran fortean prankster **TONY 'DOC' SHIELS** recalls his part in Britain's own 'mothman' scare in 1976.

I saw this monster bird last night. It stood like a man then it flew up brought the trees. It is as big as a man. Its eyes are red and shine brightly. Sally Chapman 4/7/76.


Birdman monster. Seen on 3rd July, quite late at night but not quite dark. Red eyes. Black mouth. It was very big with great big wings and black claws. Feathers grey. B. Perry 4th July 1976.

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And all that day they hunted, And nothing could they find,
But an owl in a holly tree, And that they left behind.
One said it was an owl, The other he said, Nay;
The third said 'twas an old man, And his beard growing grey. [1]

Slightly more than a quarter of a century ago – on Thursday, 1 April 1976 – the surrealist shaman Max Ernst died in Paris. On that very same All Fools' Day, members of Tom Fool's Theatre of Tomfoolery pretended to be fooled by a big, rubbery, blown-up beastie, launched in Falmouth Harbour, Cornwall, by some art student jokers. A local newspaper called the thing *Morgawr* and the name was soon applied to a longer-lived and more mysterious sea monster. Just a few miles away, in the woods around Mawnan Old Church, by the Helford River, a surprising sort of Easter egg was soon to hatch. Some egg! Some chicken!

Which came first? I suspect it was Loplop, an avian apparition, the 'Bird Superior'... the alter ego of Max Ernst. [2] In the summer of 1937, Ernst was in Cornwall with Loplop and a group of fellow surrealists, guests of Roland Penrose. [3] One night, in the Mawnan woods, to the sound of the word "Loplop", a surreal-chemical egg was laid. In 1976, two weeks after Ernst's death, with a full moon shining down on the treetops, a cracking and crackling could be heard in the higher branches – as if something was hatching, perhaps?

THE GIRLS WERE STARTLED BY A WINGED FIGURE HOVERING OVER THE CHURCH

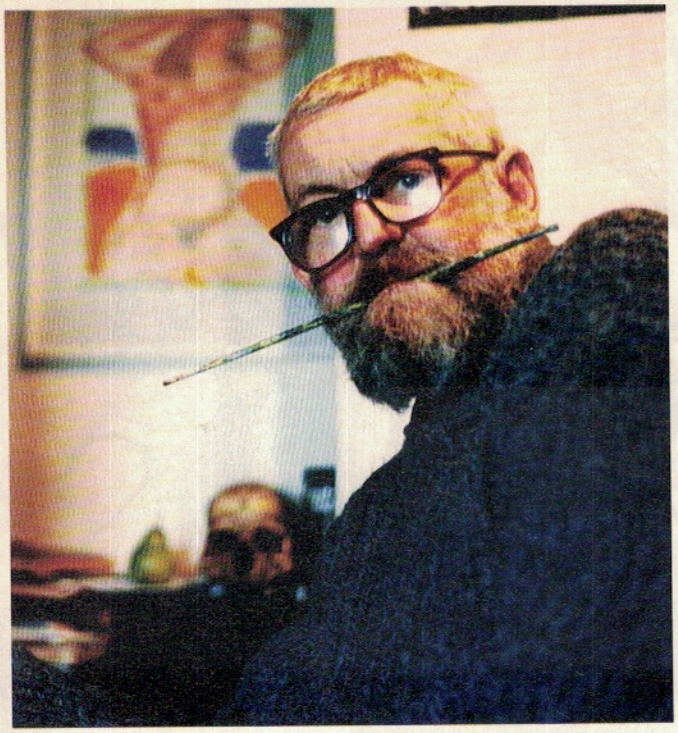
Just before noon on a sunny 17 April, two young girls, June and Vicky Melling, were playing among the gravestones of Mawnan Old Church when they heard "funny noises" coming from somewhere above. Looking up to see what could be making the sound, they were startled by the grotesque spectacle of a winged figure hovering over the church tower. The girls screamed in terror and fled the scene, their Easter holiday ruined. Owlman had arrived! [4]

I spoke to Don, father of the Melling sisters, on that Easter Saturday afternoon, at a funfair. This was after he had been told that I was a magician, a puppeteer, and a 'monster man'. Mr Melling accused me of staging the happening at Mawnan. Although flattered by the suggestion, honesty forbade me to accept credit for what seemed to be a very neat piece of conjuring. Don Melling wouldn't allow me to speak to his frightened daughters but he handed over a drawing which June made of the 'winged thing', described as "man-sized, with pointed ears and a gaping mouth." In the sketch, it appeared to be wearing drainpipes and winkle-pickers but I didn't mention this observation to Mr Melling, who seemed genuinely upset by the scare his two girls had suffered.

Dramatic stuff... and there's more! Since that first sighting, more than 25 years ago, Owlman has popped up a number of times. Almost all the witnesses were young females; the one exception being a chap who, for reasons of his own, prefers to be known as 'Gavin'. Anyway, 'Gavin' was in the company of a young female – 'Sally' – when Owlman appeared, during the summer of 1988 or 1989, in the trees near Mawnan Old Church.

'Gavin' told his story to the celebrated cryptozoologist, Jonathan Downes (who is to the Mawnan Owlman as Sydney Greenstreet is to *The Maltese Falcon*). Jon reckons that this encounter between the young (between 12 and 13) couple and Owlman really happened and it scared them both badly. 'Gavin' has referred to the Owlman as a "malevolent entity". Downes seems to agree and has linked appearances of the 'thing' with other grim shenanigans in Cornwall occurring around the same time. If Jon is right, Max Ernst may have helped invoke the *zeitgeist*, but I don't think his intentions were malicious. [5]

In 1942, André Breton wrote: "I consider Max Ernst's work to be pregnant with events destined to be realized on the plane of reality. What is more, I believe that it prefigures the very order in which these events will occur." [6] Especially in his collage 'novels' (see facing page), Ernst appears to predict many



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A TRICKY TALE: Tony 'Doc' Shiels, puppet-master, conjuror and Wizard of the Western World (left) and Mawnan Old Church, haunt of the Owlman (right).

of the bizarre events in Cornwall surrounding the time of his death on All Fools' Day, 1976. [7]

I'm sorely tempted to call these pictorial portents *The Owlman Loploprophecies*, but wouldn't wish to tread on anyone's lepidoplopteran tail-scales. There is something blackly humorous about the April Foolings. Roget lists 'owl' (along with 'booby', 'old fogey', 'dizzard', 'tom fool', etc) in his catalogue of Simple Simon synonyms. As the Tarot shows, Simple Simon will step out or in where angels fear to flock. Lest we forget, he went fishing for a whale.

If Falmouth art students (an unimaginative class of humanoids) could fabricate a pseudo sea-serpent as a bit of a prank, surely some other damned birdbrains could manufacture and manipulate a bogus birdman? When I first examined June Melling's drawing, I was reminded of those old films and photographic images of doomed Icarian characters who strapped on their home-made wings to leap and plummet from great or lesser heights (the Eiffel Tower was one memorably poignant bad choice for a jumping-off point but, in this context, could be seen as a symbol of surreal Paris). Was the Owlman really a 'dangerous sportsperson' or an over-confident hang-glider in fancy dress? No, no, the 'creature' *hovered* over the church tower. Some kind of kite, maybe? Possible, methought.

Later, however, the notion of a rod puppet suggested itself; I have a feeling that Don Melling had similar suspicions. Some puppeteering pranksters could have made a large-but-lightweight (*bunraku-tengu*) birdman and, secretly, taken it to the top of the tower. There they lurked until the sun was high in the sky and the girls were playing in the graveyard below. The jokers made a "funny noise" and the flapping puppet was hoisted for a moment or two – just long enough to scare the noontide daylights out of a pair of young sisters.

A few weeks after Owlman's Easter rising, it's possible that the jokers converted their articulated puppet into a kind of marionette, with added details, such as glowing eyes (red reflectors) and big claws (a marionette's feet are usually weighted). At the beginning of July – let's imagine – the puppet-master climbs a tree in the Mawnan woods and constructs a 'hide' or 'blind' in the upper branches. His puppet can be lowered and raised by means of a sprung spool or some type of motorised fishing reel. I'm thinking again of those "churring," "hissing" and "clicking" sounds which were heard in the woods at that time. On the evening of 3 July, Sally Chapman and Barbara Perry hear the hissing and see the Owlman. At first, they think it's a joke, so they laugh. Then the 'thing' is suddenly reeled up and into the hide; the girls scream and run away.

I met Sally and Barbara the day after their sighting. They were camping in the woods and they told me about the 'thing' they had seen there. They made drawings of it. Neither Sally nor Barbara seemed to have been especially frightened by the experience of meeting 'it' (or me!) and planned to carry on camping. Two other girls – the Greenwood sisters – claimed to have witnessed the winged terror around that period. Jane Greenwood thought "it could have been somebody playing a trick." She was right, it could have been!

From a trickster's viewpoint, the main problems in arranging a spectacle of the kind supposedly witnessed by those young ladies are not related to the mechanics of the job, but are the far more difficult questions of, for example, knowledge of the spectators' movements, precise timing of the displays, emotional and physical responses of the audience, hiding the evidence of trickery, the possibility of being caught red-handed or being laughed out of one's tree... and so on. None of them are insurmountable, but are 'tricky' indeed! I think each of the girls who claimed to have seen the thing known as Owlman – in April-July 1976 – genuinely saw a weird winged entity; but they may not have seen the genuinely weird winged entity known as Owlman. Speculation, sure, but isn't that the way with forteana?

Max Ernst knew Loplop was a phantom. If Owlman is flying 'on the plane of reality', he, she, or it is a phantom, too. Too *real* to ignore!

TONY 'DOC' SHIELS is an artist, conjuror, poet, puppet-master and monster-hunter. He is the author of several books on stage magic and the fortean classic *Monstrum*.

NOTES

1. From an old nursery rhyme: The Three Jovial Welshmen.

2. See Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Loplop* (Thames & Hudson, 1983).

3. Take a look at Doc Shiels, *Monstrum!* (Fortean Tomes, 1987, 1990) if you want the complete guest list. I knew Penrose, by the way; a very nice fellow.

4. Owlman's arrival was first announced in ***Fortean Times* 16:19**.

5. See Jonathan Downes, *The Owlman and Others* (Domra Publications, 1998). More recently, Jon made a peculiar movie with the same title.

6. See Macdonald, *Surrealism and Painting*, 1972.

7. *Une semaine de bonté* is particularly significant in relation to Owlman and other anomalous phenomena in Cornwall, 1976. Ernst created it in 1933, which was a hell of a year in many ways. The 'novel' was published as five booklets during 1934 by Editions Jeanne Bucher, Paris. The first part appeared on 15 April; the second on 16 April. The third and fourth are dated 2 July. The final booklet came out on 1 December. These dates could mean something.

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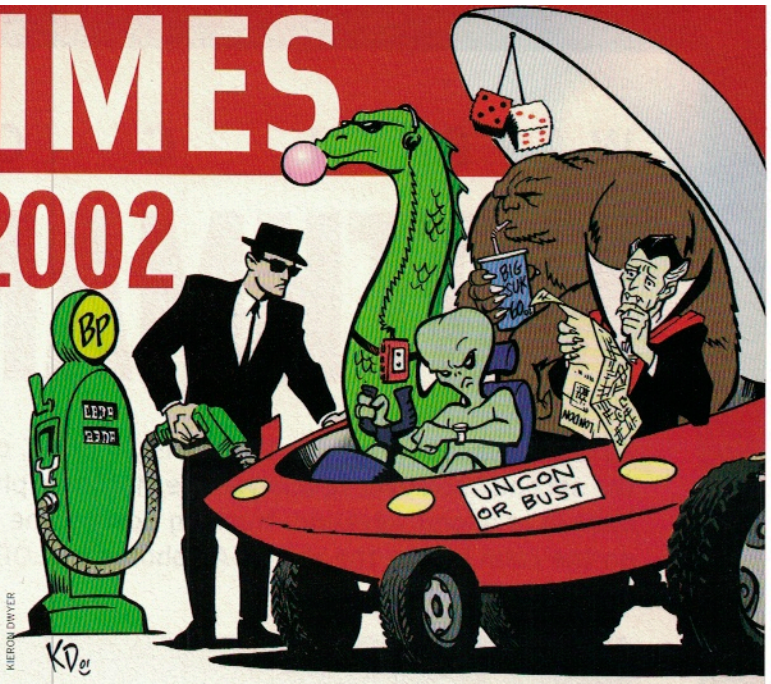

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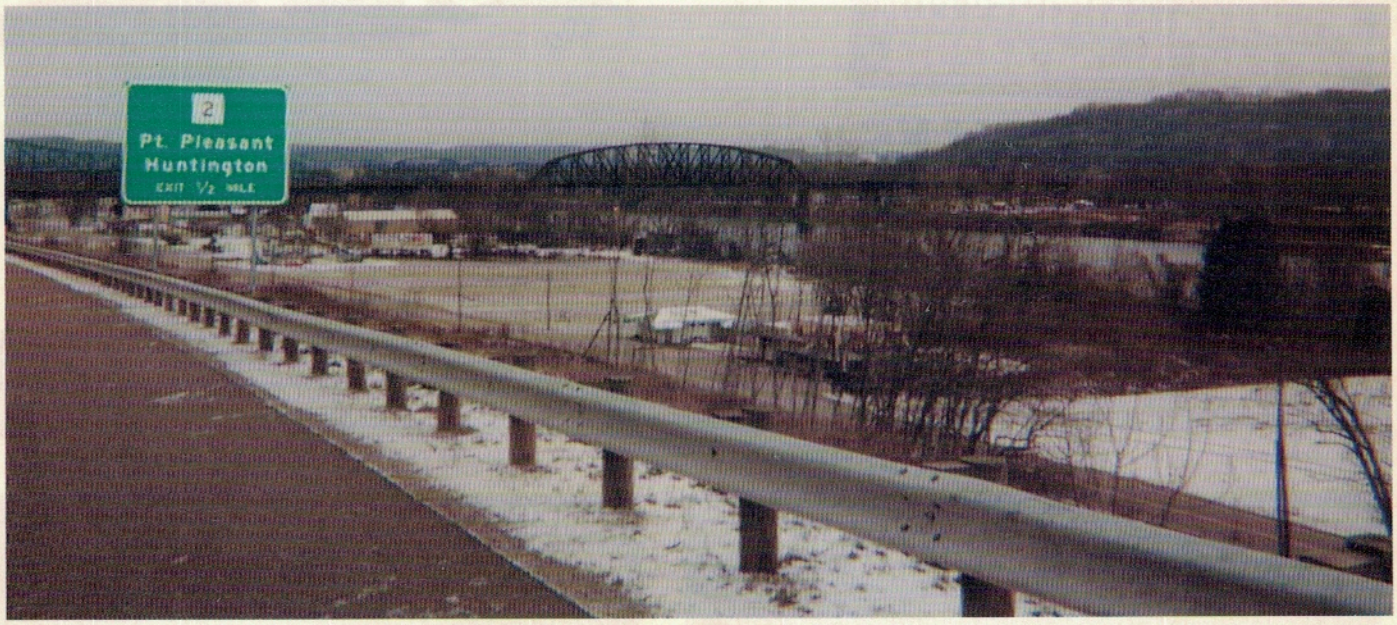
WELCOME TO MOTHMAN COUNTY

To obtain images specially for this issue of *FT*, our crypto-columnist **LOREN COLEMAN** – author of only the second book ever to analyse the Mothman phenomenon – drove to Mothman's West Virginia haunt and back in one long weekend, tracking down some key witnesses along the way. Here's his exclusive report on the calm before the storm. All photos by **LOREN COLEMAN.**



ON THE ROAD: Loren arrived in the "quaint, sleepy little town of Point Pleasant" 36 years after John Keel's original visit and the Mothman sightings (below).

In 1966, John Keel was investigating a story about a mutant cat which had sprouted wings when he first heard of Mothman; he promptly drove 545 miles (877km) to Point Pleasant in West Virginia. In the new movie, *The Mothman Prophecies*, Richard Gere's character "John Klein" gets lost driving 400 miles (644km) from Washington DC and ends up in the movie version of Point Pleasant. What wimps! I travelled four times that distance for the readers of this esteemed journal.

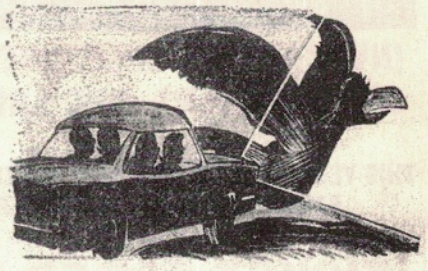
Leaving Portland, Maine, at 9.23 am, just after Christmas 2001, I arrived back home at 10.23 pm in the new year of 2002. I had travelled exactly 2,023 miles (3,256km), enduring snowy roads in the Appalachian Mountains, bad food and relatively terrible local radio stations to bring you this update on Point Pleasant in – as the local radio had it – the 'Year Twenty Oh Two'.

Some of you may think a road jaunt to West Virginia is a sortie into *Deliverance* country, with banjos playing, interbreeding (well, a little of that) and Old Pouch Chewing Tobacco signs on the sides of barns (oh, yes, they were there). In general, it was McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy's, Rite-Aids, and the rest. "Wal-Mart America" is everywhere these days, unfortunately, so I deliberately patronised the few old-fashioned diners and truck stops I came across. (Side note to forteans thinking of making a similar trip: beware of the 'tea'. I get chills just thinking about it. I'm not a coffee drinker and, rather than take my chances with god-awful generic tea bags, I took along an emergency ration of Bigelow's Constant Comment. It was a life-saver.)

I ENDURED SNOWY ROADS, BAD FOOD AND TERRIBLE RADIO STATIONS

As I roared into the quaint, sleepy, little town of Point Pleasant (pop. under 6,000), I expected to see "Home of Mothman" signs similar to those at Flatwoods, which I visited on the way down, describing the town as the "Home of the Green Monster" (more of this in a future issue). But Point Pleasant was eeri-

Couples Say They Saw 6-Ft. 100-mph 'Bird'



POINT PLEASANT, W. Va. —(UPI)— Two Point Pleasant couples told police yesterday their car was followed about midnight by a "bird-like creature" six or seven feet tall with red eyes and a 10-foot wingspan.

Steve Mallette and Roger Scarberry told Mason County sheriff's deputies they were riding with their wives near the McClintic Wildlife Reserve when they first encountered "the thing."

Sheriff Deputy Millard Holstead, investigating the report, said he was not discounting the story. He emphasized that none of the four had been drinking.

Mallette said it was large, measuring as much as seven

OLD HAUNTS: (Clockwise from top) The site of the old Silver Bridge; What was once Tiny's pizza joint, a favourite Mothman hot-spot; and one of the old 'igloos' for storing dynamite, now overgrown and choked with weeds.

ly quiet; no sign, no tourist shops and hardly any people on the three blocks of Main Street.

I checked in at the Lowe Inn – 100 years old, clean, safe and very New England-looking. It faced, across the street, a stark row of empty storefronts. Some were owned by the Finleys, who run the hotel; a perfect place for a Mothman museum, I said to myself. Ruth Finley, who ran the hotel, put me in Room 203.

AT NIGHT THE TNT AREA WAS QUIET, EVOCATIVE AND COMPLETELY DEAD

After a quick breakfast at Melinda's, the hotel gave me precise directions on how to get to the infamous TNT area, off Route 62. Fairgrounds Road is where the youth of 1966 would drag-race their '57 Chevys; it was also the entrance to "Lovers' Lane". The strange wildlife area that surrounds it is desolate and isolated. I came here four times during my stay and saw only two other cars – trucks, actually, with hunters, guns and hunting dogs. I forgot to wear orange.

The location of the original 1966–1967 sightings was now cordoned with tall fences, topped with barbed wire. The old "Bird Cage", as locals called the ghostly shell of the abandoned power plant where Mothman was most frequently seen, was torn down in the mid-1990s. Apart from its foundations – and those of its surrounding, low buildings – there was nothing left of the majestic and haunting building that figures so importantly in John Keel's *The Mothman Prophecies*. No wonder the movie's location-scouting crew rejected Point Pleasant.

I also discovered the remains of other huge buildings that don't seem to have been mentioned by earlier investigators. They looked like the giant 'Imperial Walkers' in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, now overgrown with thorny bushes. The old concrete 'igloos', used for storing dynamite, are likewise weed-covered mounds. There is some concern that toxic and nuclear wastes may have seeped into the ground there; outraged local residents recently rejected several million dollars in grants to build a new high school on the TNT site because they didn't wish to raise glowing mutant children. True story!

Further into the woods, beyond the unfenced TNT area, I found the wildlife preserve where other sightings had occurred. Tyre tracks, beer bottles and cans indicated that it still functioned as the site of sexual and alcoholic coming-of-age rituals for local youths. More sinister, however, were the dead deer carcasses, including skulls and a ribcage picked clean of flesh. Was this evidence of a recent mutilation? A Mothman dinner? Perhaps not. The TNT and wildlife areas extended for miles, affording more than enough habitat for Bigfoot, Mothman and deros too, if you ask me.

Back in town, I visited Criminal Records, the only local store that avails itself of the unique Mothman legend. They had tee-shirts sporting a weird Mothman image and a new, locally-produced book. Over the next few days, I re-visited the many special places where Mothman had been seen, including the armoury, the pizza joint that use to be Tiny's and the location of the Silver Bridge. There is a walking and driving tour yelling out to be created here.

I met up with David Levine, CEO of butterfly.net, creators of the new Internet computer game entitled *Mothmen*, who wanted to see what a cryptozoologist does. I returned to the TNT area with him late one night; it was quiet, evocative, secluded… and dead. Levine and I went to meet Marcella Bennett and her son Mark, who was six years old when they both saw Mothman.

I talked to many other people about Mothman, of course, including Linda Scarberry, one of the four people whose terrifying encounter was the first to gain headlines in November 1966. She told me that the cover of my new book had the best illustration she had ever seen of the way Mothman appeared to her. She still tells her grandchildren about how kind and helpful John Keel was to her. My beard confused her grandchil-

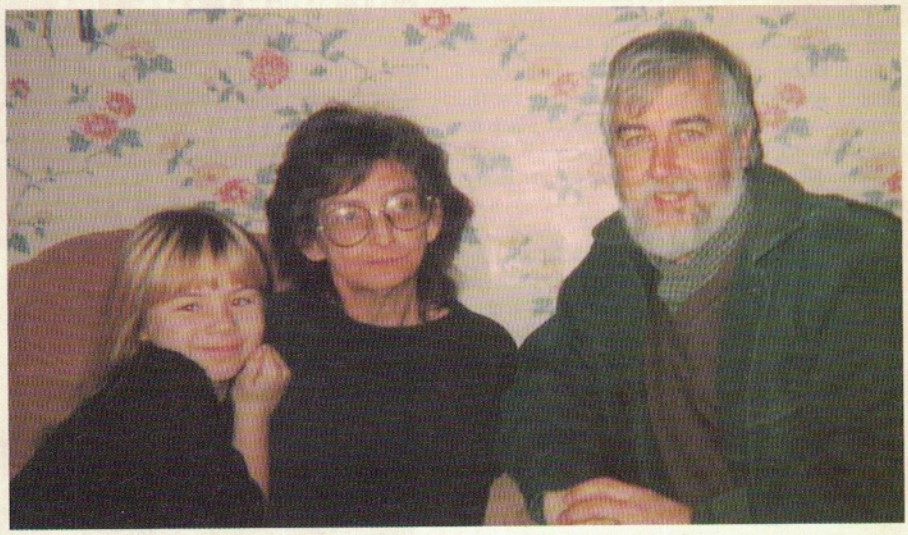
MEMORIES OF MOTHMAN: (Clockwise from top)

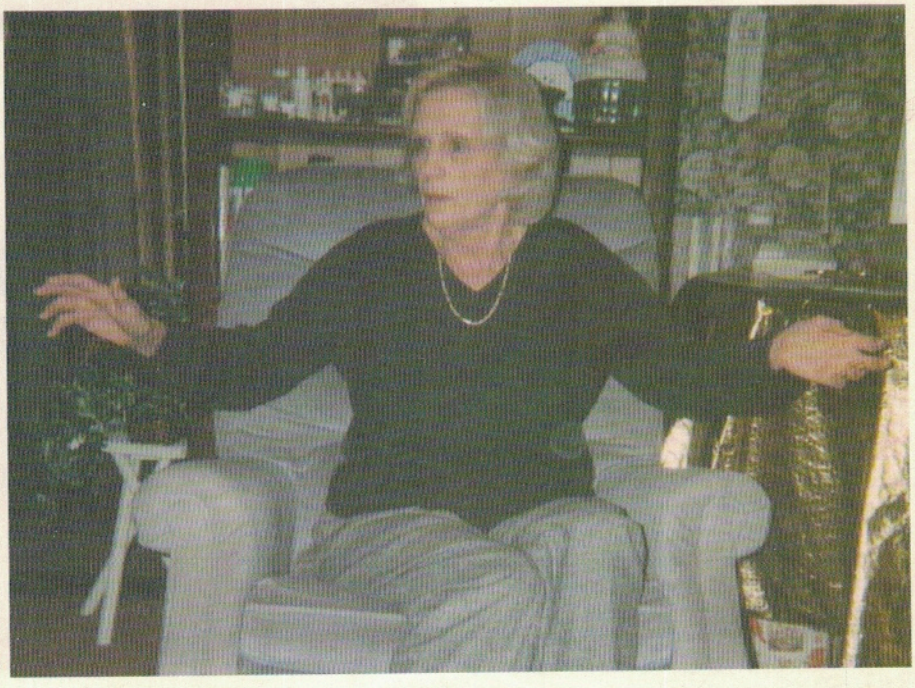
Most of the original buildings have gone from the TNT area today, with only their foundations visible. The remains of some huge structures looked like the giant 'Imperial Walkers' from *Star Wars*.

Original Mothman witness Linda Scarberry, her granddaughter and Loren Coleman in Linda's West Virginia Home.

Marcella Bennett, another witness, does her best Mothman impression. Actually, she's demonstrating how the entity's wings hit the side of her car as she sped away.

Loren Coleman talks over the phone with John Keel from Room 203 in the Lowe Inn, Point Pleasant.





CIVIC PRIDE: Point Pleasant's Chamber of commerce has woken up to the commercial potential of their most famous son. Hilda Austin, Executive Director, with the Mothman beanie.

dren and, to the end of my visit, they insisted on calling me 'John'. I called John Keel from my hotel room and told him that he was still remembered and held in high regard in Point Pleasant. Inevitably, we had some telephone trouble as we talked.

Just listening to the original witnesses, I was struck by their horror stories of poverty, mental anguish and what we now know as post-traumatic stress. Linda Scarberry, in particular, seems to have been picked on by history and Mothman. She is a worn-down but modest person who will not see any of the millions that Hollywood will make from her personal encounter with high strangeness. Sadly, in severe financial distress last year, she had to sell her unique collection of Mothman documents – including news articles, notebooks and letters from Keel – and the rights to it for just $300. Now, a local entrepreneur has turned that archive into a book being sold for $18.95. Copies of the first hardbound edition of John Keel's *The Mothman Prophecies* can fetch between $115 and $245 in online auctions. Poor Linda Scarberry was beaten again.

I hope that the people of Point Pleasant benefit from the tourism that should develop in the wake of the film. They are sitting on a paranormal, ufological and fortean goldmine, if it can be developed sensitively. However, Linda Scarberry and some other witnesses do not want to be found. That is understandable! They don't live in Point Pleasant any longer, they have changed their names and they don't have telephones. Nevertheless, the depressed economy of Point Pleasant could prosper from their unwanted legacy – as Roswell did – but people are only just waking up to this.

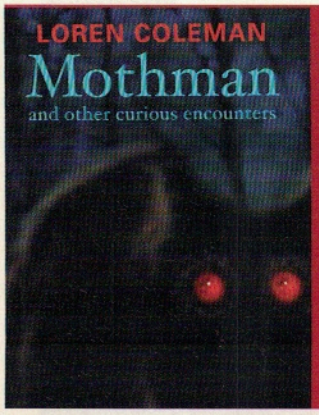
As 2002 dawned, the only Chamber of Commerce plaques visible around town were those honouring Revolutionary War veterans, sheriff's deputies killed in a jail explosion in 1976 and the victims of the Silver Bridge disaster of 1967… but not one plaque, local flyer, map, postcard, street sign or specialty shop that mentions or exploits the historical significance of Mothman. But there is a change in the wind.

Last summer, for the first time in Point Pleasant's history, its Chamber of Commerce began producing something with a Mothman on it. Curiously, it is a Christmas ornament (although the image looks too human to me). I saw, also, the first copies of a tee-shirt and a beanie doll. Still, the town lacks any Mothman museums, bumper stickers, or street signs. No bookstore in town carries Mothman-related publications.

I CALLED JOHN KEEL FROM MY ROOM AND TOLD HIM HE WAS REMEMBERED

The Year 2002 is going to change Point Pleasant forever. In mid-January, HBO (a popular cable network in the USA) screened *The Making of The Mothman Prophecies*. On 22 January 22, the F/X cable network showed (for 10 days) the David Grabias-produced documentary *Search for the Mothman* which told the true story – including interviews with Scarberry, Bennett, Keel, Coleman and others – behind the new movie which opened all across America on 25 January, and overseas soon thereafter. I sincerely hope Point Pleasant is ready.

LOREN COLEMAN, of Portland, Maine, has engaged in cryptozoological fieldwork since 1960, and is the author of 14 books, including *Mysterious America* , and *Mothman and Other Curious Encounters* (Paraview, NY, 2002). He spent New Year's Eve 2001, as well as New Year's Day, 2002, in Point Pleasant, West Virginia. His website can be found at www.lorencoleman.com



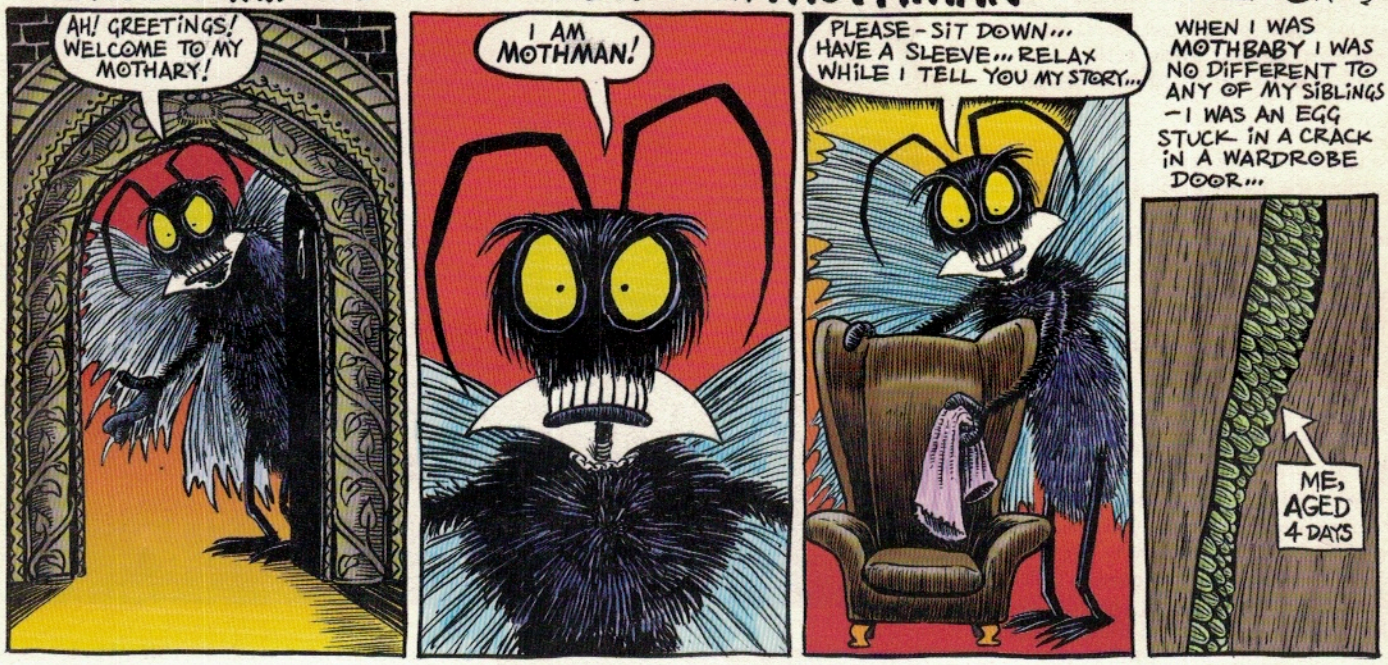
MOTHMAN PROPHECIES COMPETITION

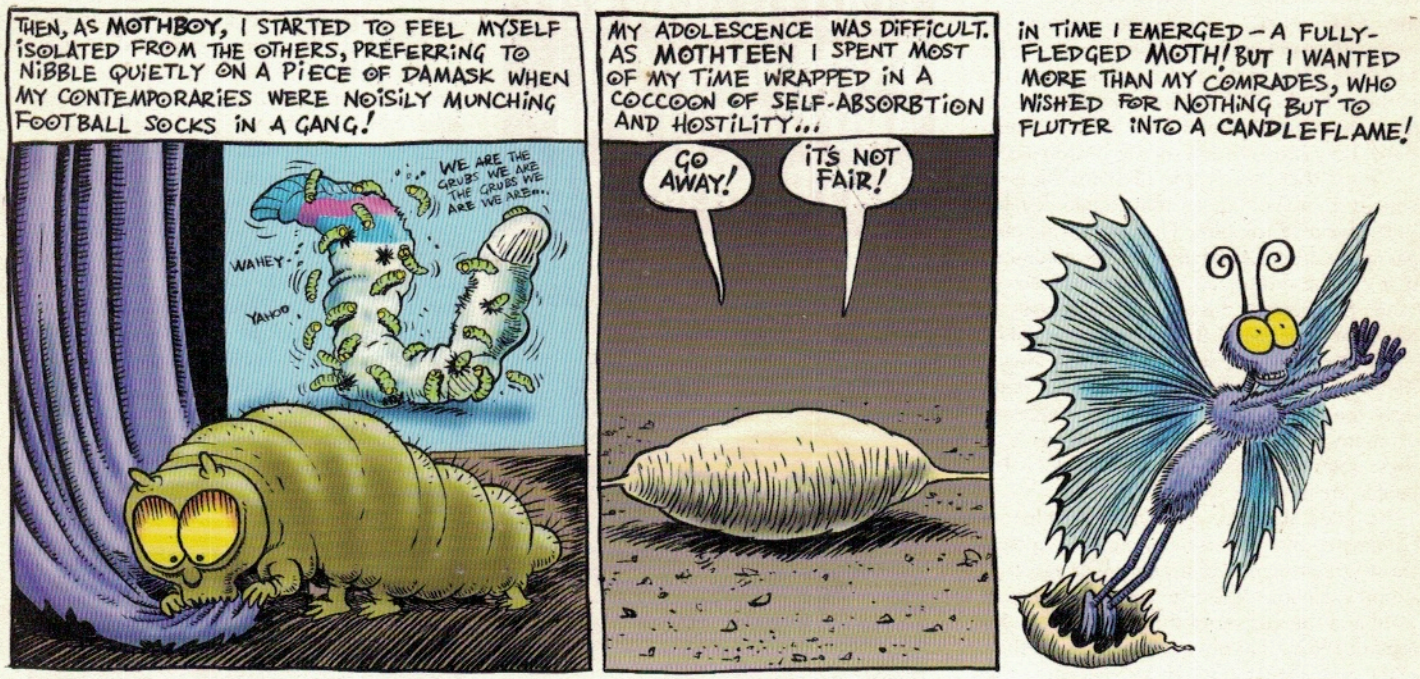
THANKS TO PARAVIEW PRESS, WE HAVE FIVE SIGNED COPIES OF LOREN COLEMAN'S NEW BOOK, *MOTHMAN AND OTHER CURIOUS ENCOUNTERS*, TO GIVE AWAY. JUST TELL US: WHAT NAME DID JOHN KEEL GIVE TO HIS EXTRATERRESTRIAL TRICKSTERS?

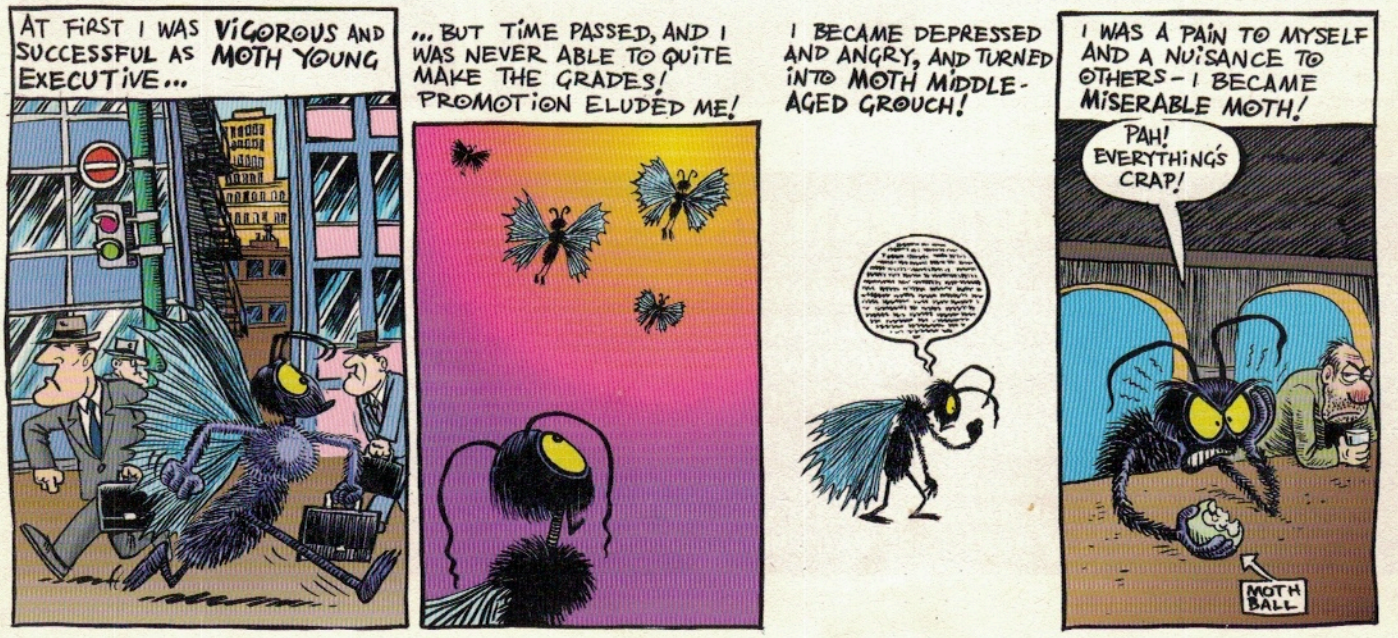
ANSWERS ON A POSTCARD TO: 'FT156 MOTHMAN COMPETITION', FREEPOST (SWB 1446), PATCHWAY, BRISTOL, BS32 0ZZ, OR BY EMAIL TO: FORTEANTIMES@CISUBS.CO.UK WITH 'FT MOTHMAN COMP' AS THE SUBJECT LINE BY 20 MARCH 2002.

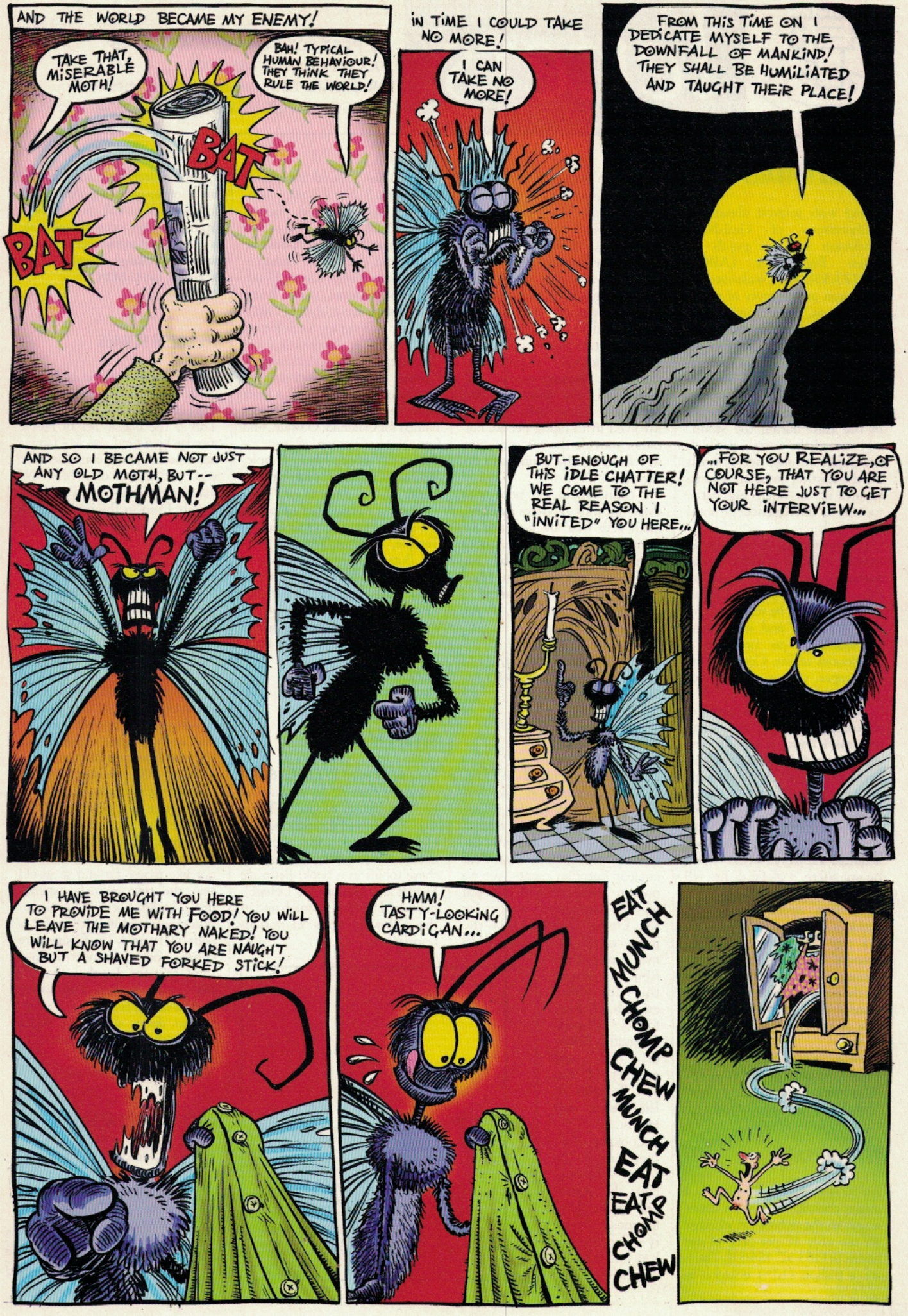
PHENOMENOMIX • AN INTERVIEW WITH MOTHMAN •

HUNT EMERSON 2001 2002


AH! GREETINGS! WELCOME TO MY MOTHARY!
I AM MOTHMAN!
PLEASE - SIT DOWN... HAVE A SLEEVE... RELAX WHILE I TELL YOU MY STORY...
WHEN I WAS MOTHBABY I WAS NO DIFFERENT TO ANY OF MY SIBLINGS - I WAS AN EGG STUCK IN A CRACK IN A WARDROBE DOOR...
ME, AGED 4 DAYS


THEN, AS MOTHBOY, I STARTED TO FEEL MYSELF ISOLATED FROM THE OTHERS, PREFERRING TO NIBBLE QUIETLY ON A PIECE OF DAMASK WHEN MY CONTEMPORARIES WERE NOISILY MUNCHING FOOTBALL SOCKS IN A GANG!
WE ARE THE GRUBS WE ARE THE GRUBS WE ARE WE ARE...
WAHEY-
YAHOO
MY ADOLESCENCE WAS DIFFICULT. AS MOTHTEEN I SPENT MOST OF MY TIME WRAPPED IN A COCCOON OF SELF-ABSORBTION AND HOSTILITY...
GO AWAY!
IT'S NOT FAIR!
IN TIME I EMERGED - A FULLY-FLEDGED MOTH! BUT I WANTED MORE THAN MY COMRADES, WHO WISHED FOR NOTHING BUT TO FLUTTER INTO A CANDLEFLAME!


AT FIRST I WAS VIGOROUS AND SUCCESSFUL AS MOTH YOUNG EXECUTIVE...
... BUT TIME PASSED, AND I WAS NEVER ABLE TO QUITE MAKE THE GRADES! PROMOTION ELUDED ME!
I BECAME DEPRESSED AND ANGRY, AND TURNED INTO MOTH MIDDLE-AGED GROUCH!
I WAS A PAIN TO MYSELF AND A NUISANCE TO OTHERS - I BECAME MISERABLE MOTH!
PAH! EVERYTHING'S CRAP!
MOTH BALL


AND THE WORLD BECAME MY ENEMY!
TAKE THAT, MISERABLE MOTH!
BAT
BAT
BAH! TYPICAL HUMAN BEHAVIOUR! THEY THINK THEY RULE THE WORLD!
IN TIME I COULD TAKE NO MORE!
I CAN TAKE NO MORE!
FROM THIS TIME ON I DEDICATE MYSELF TO THE DOWNFALL OF MANKIND! THEY SHALL BE HUMILIATED AND TAUGHT THEIR PLACE!
AND SO I BECAME NOT JUST ANY OLD MOTH, BUT-- MOTHMAN!
BUT-ENOUGH OF THIS IDLE CHATTER! WE COME TO THE REAL REASON I "INVITED" YOU HERE...
...FOR YOU REALIZE, OF COURSE, THAT YOU ARE NOT HERE JUST TO GET YOUR INTERVIEW...
I HAVE BROUGHT YOU HERE TO PROVIDE ME WITH FOOD! YOU WILL LEAVE THE MOTHARY NAKED! YOU WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE NAUGHT BUT A SHAVED FORKED STICK!
HMM! TASTY-LOOKING CARDIGAN...
EAT
MUNCH
CHOMP
CHEW
MUNCH
EAT
EAT
CHOMP
CHEW

letters

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CATS AND FIREBALLS

I read with interest about the deliberations of Gail-Nina Anderson and her pupils on Alien Big Cats (ABCs) [*FT153:53*]. Their wide-ranging discussion on the story of a fireball entering a barn and a lynx rushing out sounded refreshingly fortean. I was sorry, therefore, to read her conclusion which implied that the local newspaper's subsequent report of the event as "a polecat took shelter in the barn during the storm" represented the 'facts', of which her pupil's hearsay account was but a distortion based on "expectations of an alien big cat… rooted in a sequence of local sightings".

Unfortunately, a newspaper version is at least as likely to misrepresent any possible 'facts' as the grapevine is. A fortean approach might be to include all the versions – and indeed the discussions – as links in a continuous reality. Certainly the newspaper version should not exclude the other.

Besides, I have never heard of a polecat sheltering in a barn, whereas I know of at least one other example of a fireball engendering a big cat. In a pleasingly fortean coincidence, it appeared three pages earlier in the same edition of *Fortean Times*. Steve Moore, describing how Eusebios acquired the bætyl, writes "when he got there, a globe of fire fell from the sky, and as it landed, a great lion appeared standing beside it. The lion vanished …"

I am currently researching unusual sightings of, or encounters with, ABCs for a book on the subject, and would be very grateful if readers felt inclined to pass on any relevant experiences to me.

MERRILY HARPUR
Reagh, Strokestown, Co Roscommon, Ireland.
Merrilyharpur@yahoo.co.uk

TEN PER CENT

As a neurologist, I thought I might contribute my two cents' worth to the debate on whether we use only 10 per cent of our brains [FT153:52, 155:53]. There are a trillion (10^{12}) neurons in the human brain; it is the electrical impulses passing through these neurons that comprise our thoughts and emotions. There are also 10 trillion (10^{13}) glial cells in the human brain. These consist of astroglia, which provide the scaffolding and nutrition for the neurons, oligodendrocytes, which manufacture myelin (the insulation that wraps around axons), microglia, which act as the brain's immune system, and ependymal cells, which line the ventricles. These cells are not involved in thinking per se, but rather provide the infrastructure which allows the neurons to do their job.

I cannot help but note that there are thus 10 times as many brain cells that are not used to cogitate as those that are, and I wonder if it is this fact that lies behind the misconception – not really a misconception at all – that we think with only 10 per cent of our brains.

R ANDREW SEWELL MD
Department of Neurology, University of Massachusetts Medical School

FUN WITH NAMES

I was very interested in Tony Leather's article on the lost underground city of the Grand Canyon, especially his remark that "The Grand Canyon is festooned with places that bear ancient Egyptian names, yet no one in authority can tell you why". I immediately set out for the Grand Canyon (via the magic carpet of a detailed US map on CD-Rom) to check this out. Sure enough, I soon found Cheops Pyramid, a Tower of Set and another of Ra, and Temples of Isis, Osiris, and Horus.

Looking further afield, it soon became clear that someone with a liking for ancient history and mythology had had a lot of fun with these place-names. I found the following groups: Roman/Greek – Temples to Apollo, Venus, Jupiter, Juno, Castor, Pollux, Diana, and Vesta, as well as buttes named for Scylla and Charybdis. Indian – Temples to Rama, Deva, Bhuddha, and Vishnu, while Rama and Krishna have 'shrines'. Middle East – Temples to Solomon and Sheba, a Tabernacle, and Zoroaster Canyon. Arthurian – Castles for King Arthur and Guinevere, an Excalibur, a Holy Grail Temple, and other features named for Galahad, Gawain, and Lancelot. Germanic/Norse – Wotan's Throne, Thor Temple, Walhalla Plateau and Dragon Head.

There are also other names in the same vein, such as Confucius Temple, Masonic Temple, Temple Butte, Cathedral Stairs and Angels Gate. Did all these places have some hidden relationship with a secret city, or, as seems more likely, are we just seeing the end results of imaginative map-making?

ROGER DOWNHAM
Penryn, Cornwall

SECRET ROOMS

'Jurassic Library' [*FT151:28–32*] mentions that Dr Javier Cabrera has two "secret rooms". This is true. He showed them to me several times and I was the first author to publish photos from these rooms in a book: *Bevor die Sintflut kam* (Before the Deluge), published 1995 in Munich and in the following years in various translations.

Let me draw your attention to my homepage, http://alien.de/langbein. You will find photos from Cabrera's secret chamber at: www.alien.de/langbein/ica.html and www.alien.de/langbein/ica2.html

WALTER LANGBEIN
by email

FIENDISH FERALS

On the subject of the rabbit innards found neatly piled on Steve Cooper's shed floor [*FT153:53*]. This is the classic act of rabbit murder by a feral cat. My family has rescued many cats over the years and, rather than have too many in the house, these animals mainly lived in the outbuildings of the remote house that my parents owned.

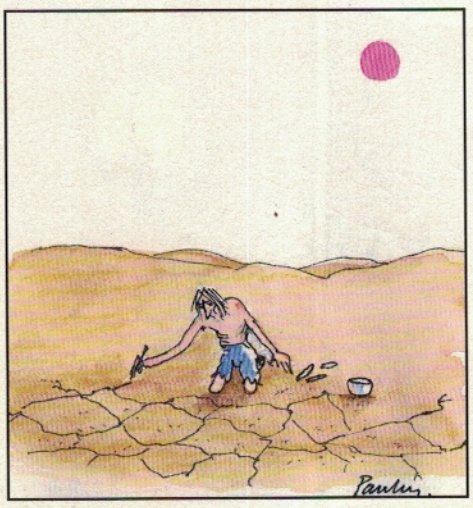
Cats allowed to explore their wild side like this become expert hunters and often shocked me with their skill at killing prey. I have found neat piles of innards like this on many occasions, often inside sheds. I have witnessed cats kill an animal and wait for it to cool down, touching it occasionally with a paw, waiting for the blood to coagulate so that the cat does not get messy whilst eating. Cats are fussy and fastidious animals and will leave the parts of an animal that they are not fond of.

We once had a cat that didn't like the liver of mice and so left this on our doorstep after killing one and we had another that did not like mouse fur and so would skin the tiny animals expertly first. The kind of skilful evisceration mentioned by Mr Cooper is perfectly normal. The Coopers are clearly not cat owners as they think that the dog they own ("a real softie") and its mess would deter a cat! It is simply not possible to deter an expert feline hunter when it has the scent.

DAWN FINCH
St Albans, Hertfordshire

ANTIPODAL PRAYER

Having noticed on the news last night a Muslim praying with face towards Mecca, I was struck by the whimsical thought that, should a Muslim be situated at the antipodal point to the Holy City, he could legitimately face in any direction. I got out my atlas



PAUL TAYLOR

to locate the antipode of Mecca, and found that it was (near as damn) Muroroa atoll, infamous as the site of French nuclear weapons testing in recent decades. The significance of this conjunction is clearly great. Are any readers aware of other strange antipodal relationships?

MIKE GAHAN
London

MICROSOFT ACRONYM

Reading the January 2002 issue of *Computer Shopper* (#167), I found in its Helpfile section (p392) the following: "...if you have updated Internet Explorer recently, Microsoft will have urged you to install a Critical Updates Notification Tool, which may check for updates every five minutes." This in an issue where Matthew Holbrook witters away for nearly three pages on computer acronyms!

The author, Paul Mullen, assures me that this is accurate and that Microsoft is indeed urging users to install a C.U.N.T. which checks for updates every five minutes. I wonder if Bill Gates knows?

RICHARD ALEXANDER
by email

HEUVELMANS ON LIFE EXTENSION

To your Heuvelmans bibliography **[*FT15153:26*]** you might like to add his 1951 trilogy, published under the collective title of *Le Secret des Parques* (The Secret of the Fates), comprising *La prolongation de la vie* (The Extension of Life); *La suppression de la mort* (The Abolition of Death); and *Le rajeunissement* (rejuvenation)

Each volume has a key phrase on its cover: "Certain people live beyond the age of 120: we could, if we wish, increase their number." "Death is the tribute we pay to love." "The fear of death is the beginning of ageing."

As their titles suggest, the books represent a three-pronged attack on accepted thinking about life and death. If at the age of 135 Madame Durand could celebrate the 100th anniversary of her wedding, why shouldn't the rest of us emulate her? Particularly since her favourite occupation was getting drunk.

As a biologist, Heuvelmans enjoys teasing us with such questions as: When a cell divides into two, which is the mother and which the daughter? As we would expect from this author, his reasoning is firmly based in scientific fact and observation, from which his conclusions are logically derived.

He describes, inter alia, the oriental rejuvenation technique of Kaya Kalpa, which starts with a thorough spring-cleaning of the internal organs, and culminates in a series of procedures which might well make the candidate for longer life think death a preferable alternative, consisting as they do of repeated vomiting, purging from top to bottom and vice versa.

And that's just the preliminaries: from then on there are a choice of procedures, most involving some kind of spiritual back-to-the-womb regression enabling the individual to make a fresh start along life's pathway. In 1938 a well-known Indian nationalist, pandit Malaviya, submitted to this treatment which, according to commentators, leads to life-spans of 200 years or more. It would be interesting to know if he is still around: it would be a good advertisement for the process.

Evidently, though, Heuvelmans was not sufficiently convinced that he felt like giving it a try himself. Otherwise you might have deferred his obituary until your issue of December 2116 or so.

HILARY EVANS
London

BULWER LYTTON

In 'Worlds Beneath Our Feet' **[*FT153:46*]**, Bruce Lanier Wright talked about fictional worlds that have appeared in books and movies through the years. One world that he didn't mention was that described in *The Coming Race* (1871) by Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton (1803–1873). This SF classic, one of Hitler's favourites, was a masterpiece of utopian satire. It anticipates nuclear energy and laser technology.

Bernard Shaw said about the book: "In Lord Lytton's 'Coming Race', he represents an ordinary man of our time straying by accident into a subterranean country inhabited by a race several centuries ahead of us in evolution. This application of the theory of evolution introduces something like scientific method into the modern novel."

The book introduced the idea of 'Vril', a wonderful but awesome energy force that can create, power and destroy life. The word also provided the name for that meaty product known as Bovril.

PETER LYTHGOE
by email

MR JAMES AND PANIC

John Robinson **[*FT153:54*]** describing "sylvan dread", makes reference to a BBC TV Christmas broadcast of an MR James story, *The Three Crowns of Anglia*. The name of the story (and the subsequent adaptation) is actually "A Warning To The Curious". The BBC production was written and directed by Lawrence Gordon Clark. It was first broadcast in 1972, and repeated in 1992. Mr Robinson is quite right to point out that Clark's adaptation includes a most effective portrayal of panic fear; this scene, however, is not to be found in James' original tale. Elsewhere in James, though, we do find the following most suggestive passage, from the 1925 story "A Neighbour's Landmark".

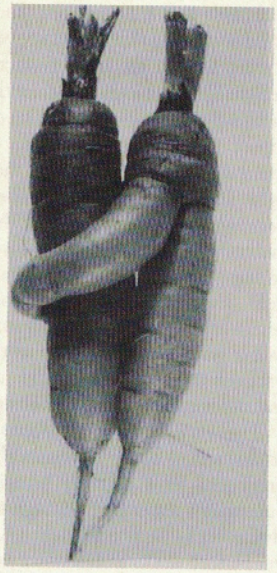
The narrator is standing on the site of an old wood, now torn up, which used to have a "bad name" locally ("never a bit of game in it, and... never a bird's nest there"), when he hears "a note of incredible sharpness, like the shriek of a bat, only ten times intensified."

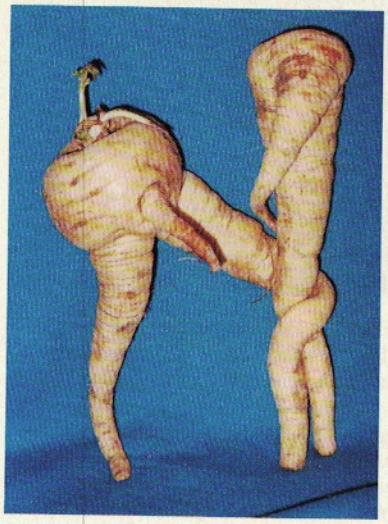
Beforehand, the narrator had found the pastoral scene pleasant; now, though: "When I turned to it again, the taste was gone out of it. The sun was down behind the hill, and the light was off the fields, and when the clock bell in the Church tower struck seven, I thought no longer of kind mellow evening hours of rest, and scents of flowers and woods on evening air...; but instead images came to me of dusty beams and creeping spiders and savage owls up in the tower, and forgotten graves and their ugly contents below, and of flying Time and all it had taken out of my life. And just then into my left ear – close as if lips had been put within an inch of my head, the frightful scream came thrilling again... all its effect was to take away every vestige, every possibility, of enjoyment, and make this no place to stay in one moment more."

To us, this sounds like a first-hand and most heartfelt description of panic fear, and we wonder: might MR James himself ever have fallen prey to it?

ROSEMARY PARDOE
Chester
STEVE DUFFY
Colwyn Bay

SIMULACRA CORNER

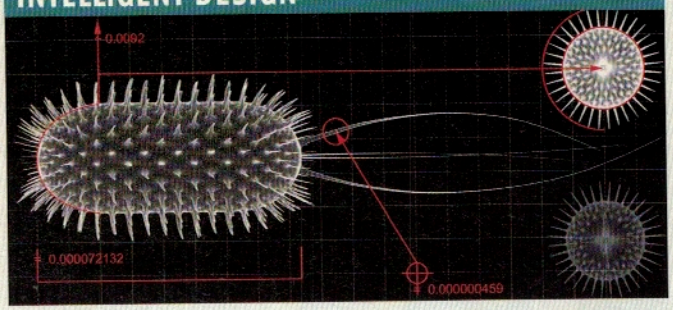




These amorous parsnips were photographed by Adam Moores of Beaminster in Dorset. We can't recall where the loving carrots (far left) came from.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the editorial post box (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) and we'll pay a fiver or ten dollars for any we use.

INTELLIGENT DESIGN



The basic thesis of Vicki Ecker's article on Intelligent Design (ID) [*FT154:30–33*] – that nature shows the work of a designer – is not new, as the teleological argument has been in existence since at least Plato's *Timaeus*. By repeatedly calling ID a "new" theory, Ecker ignores the history of philosophy, and hence the reasons why the argument has been rejected in the past.

The identity of the ID view with the teleological or watchmaker argument is shown by the appearance of "the watch" – a teleological standby since the 18th century. A natural object brings the precision of a watch to mind with its structure. A watch is designed; therefore the natural object is designed. This is an inference, not a syllogism, and remains unproved. A natural object and a watch may look similar but have different histories.

By the way, FT's introduction to Ecker's article describes both Newton and Darwin as "devout Christians". But Newton was an astrologer as well as a mathematician and the notion that Darwin was a Christian who recanted evolution on his deathbed was refuted in one of your own excellent MythConception columns. A colleague of mine who recently published an audio play about Darwin tells me that by his death he was an atheist; I'm presuming that was based on research.

In denying textbooks are impartial, Ecker misses the point. Of course they aren't impartial – they're teaching the accepted view duh! Teachers teach the current generally accepted best-guess, that's what paradigm means, and that (together with how to think) is what they "should" be teaching. Calling them partial and accusing them of playing "tricks" pointing to a "deeper disease" is nonsense.

SIMON BUCHER-JONES
by email

Ecker displays several of the signs of nonscience (pronounced 'nonshense', a coining of Brian J Ford).

First, she fails to apply Occam's Razor with any vigour. The basis for the ID hypothesis appears to be merely that its adherents cannot believe that, for instance, a bacterial flagellum can have been assembled at random. Well, so what? That's their problem. Strictly, of course, the process is not random, as the organ is constructed on protein and DNA templates and chemical gradients, all of which can be demonstrated. Personal incredulity is no basis for a theory.

Secondly, the appeal to authority is always a warning sign. We are given 'Dr Philip Johnson, a professor emeritus' no less – but at a law school! On biological matters he is a layman, and his views of no greater import than mine.

A third sign is the martyrdom claimed for those who 'dare' to challenge the accepted orthodoxy. True, there are fashions in scientific investigation as in any other field, and in an age which lacks scientists of independent means like Darwin, anyone whose income depends on following fashion will find discouragement in pursuing unpopular lines. It is a known fault in professional science, but hardly martyrdom.

Ecker asks 'what is the evidence' for ID, and then can't come up with anything other than personal incredulity. We could perhaps examine just how 'intelligent' the design is, however, by having a quick look at some of the grosser design faults in humans. Any human engineer who arranged that the airway crossed the food canal so that choking on food was a very real possibility would deserve to be sacked. Similarly, the old joke about placing the playground too near the sewage works has some validity. There are good evolutionary reasons for both, but an omnipotent designer had better come up with an excuse, and fast!

JERRY MONK
Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex

The proponents of ID make much of the supposed perfection of nature, and argue that evolution is incapable of turning out such handiwork unaided. However, Nature is very far from perfectly designed. For an example, take the mammalian eye. Nerve cells lie on top of the light-sensitive cells of the retina, partially blocking their light. To reach the brain, these nerves have to form a bundle that pierces the light-sensitive layer, creating a blind spot in the visual field. Even a bright six-year-old, designing an eye from scratch, would have run the nerves to the back of the retina, to avoid any interference with light-gathering.

There are many more examples of this sort of botched job, roughly analogous to a plumber bringing your mains water pipe through the living room at head-height. And yet Nature works wonderfully well, despite the underlying cludges and compromises. So what we seem to be looking at is a fundamentally Stupid Designer, but one who has had the luxury of tinkering endlessly with prototypes in the field until they work smoothly. Hmmm. Evolution, anyone?

GRANT HUTCHISON
Dundee, Tayside

Ecker's disingenuous article tries to give the impression that a new label on an old idea makes it radical and modern, whereas it is actually a warmed-over version of William Paley's Argument from Design.

The writer vainly tries to distance ID from Creationism, clearly realising the intellectual bankruptcy of that mish-mash. What worries proponents of evolution about Creationism is not its attempt to provide an alternative explanation for the natural world, but rather its intellectual dishonesty, the vacuous attitude to science it embodies, and the unsavoury political agenda which underpins it. A disinclination to teach Creationism is not the expression of an arbitrary wish to exclude dissenting opinion from some prevailing orthodoxy, but a desire to keep religion out of science teaching.

TOM RUFFLES
West Winch, Norfolk

Ecker's article is very sympathetic to Jonathan Wells, Michael Behe, William Dembski, and Philip Johnson, the leaders of a recent movement to make ID academically respectable. Unfortunately, she didn't get the whole story.

She presents the ID advocates as the underdog, combated by establishment science and the National Center for Science Education (NCSE), but doesn't mention the role of the Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture and the Discovery Institute, which is providing financing for ID which dwarfs the budget of the NCSE. (The NCSE operates on a shoestring budget and relies heavily on volunteer activities.)

The Discovery Institute's "wedge strategy" (now widely available online) describes the group's ambition to replace "materialist science" with theistic science. Their strategy involves a great deal of political activity and propagandising, but apparently little in the way of doing actual science.

I would like to add to Ecker's reading list a few books which address some of the philosophical and scientific arguments of the ID movement in some detail: Robert Pennock's *The Tower of Babel* and *Intelligent Design – Creationism and Its Critics*, and Kenneth Miller's *Finding Darwin's God*. There are also some excellent online resources which address the ID movement, including those at http://www.talkorigins.org/ and Wesley Elsberry's critiques of William Dembski's work at http://inia.cls.org/~welsberr/evobio/evc/ae/dembski_wa.html.

JIM LIPPARD
Phoenix, Arizona

I wonder if Ecker has read any of the books that answer the claims of the so-called science of ID, such as *Finding Darwin's God* or *The Blind Watchmaker*. Or has she looked up the numerous websites which show the logical fallacies of the ID argument? ID is nothing more than the old creationist claptrap given the latest biochemical and molecular biological twist to make it seem like real science. The ID argument is not 'bad science' as stated in the article – it is not science at all. It has no predictive value and is not falsifiable.

MEIRION ROBERTS
Bangor, Gwynedd

Forget Darwin – stripped to its essentials, the argument between the advocates of ID and their opponents comes down to the simple question: if there is intelligent design, whose is the intelligence? Aliens won't do as an answer because presumably someone/something designed them. So that leaves God – a solution which answers nothing because God is the deepest mystery of all, being beyond definition or comprehension.

STEPHEN TYNDALE-BISCOE
Leeds, West Yorkshire

SPOOKED IN THE HIGHLANDS

Nearly 20 years ago, a friend and I, on holiday in Scotland near Aviemore, decided to take her small dog for an hour's walk in a forested area near the guest house where we were staying. It was a late afternoon or early evening at the end of June, fine weather, so the light was still very good.

We started to walk along the forest track, and after about 10 minutes came to a clearing where the road forked. There was an old-fashioned caravan (the type that roadmen would have used pre-war) parked in the clearing, but no sign of any activity.

At the edge of the clearing we both stopped and said: "Which way?" Then, together, one of us said: "I don't want to go any further," and the other said: "Let's turn back." My friend said: "It's spooky, isn't it?" and I thoroughly agreed. We couldn't get away from the spot quickly enough, and on comparing notes afterwards we discovered that both of us had the hair on the back of our necks standing up.

When we reached the road again, we were puzzled to find that the gate that we had struggled to open to gain access to the forest and had given up on and squeezed in round the side, was mysteriously lying wide open. Who had been there in that 15 minutes, miles out in the countryside, and opened the gate?

When we arrived back at the guest house, we related the events to the owner, who promised to make enquiries about the forested area. My friend returned with her husband to the guest house the following year, and was told there was a cottage down the lane we had walked down. This had been standing derelict for many years, and had been bought and modernised, but the new owners had lived in it for only a fortnight before departing. The cottage had not been lived in again after that.

MRS E KNIGHT
Norley, Cheshire

ROTATING LIGHTS

I was intrigued by the review of Helen Hack's *The Mystery of the Mayanup Poltergeist* [**FT147:57**]. I was not previously aware of the events described, but as a boy I lived in Collie, not far from Mayanup, Western Australia, and in the early 1950s had about my only strange experience in this general region. The review mentioned "strange lights" and although my experience did not match anything that was described, what I saw was in the same period, and may be of interest to those who attempt to connect these things.

I had a job at Dumbleyung and used to hitchhike home to Collie on Saturday and back to Dumbleyung on Sunday night. On this occasion, I was returning to work on Sunday night, but traffic was very sparse and I had to walk about 18 miles (29km) on the road between Collie and Wagin before I got a lift. It was fine, but very dark, and I think it was probably overcast or moonless, and I guess it must have been summer.

At some point along the road I saw strange lights in a paddock, around 150 yards to the south of the road. Two lights moved together and apart at a steady and continuous rate of about one cycle every two seconds. You have probably seen the kind of giant water sprinkler used in parks and sports fields that has a long boom pivoting around its centre, with a sprinkler at each end of the boom. As the water sprays, the boom rotates. If you imagine one of these with a light at each end of the boom, you will have a pretty good idea of the effect I saw.

It was as quiet as any lonely bush road could be, with no traffic and no wind, but I could not hear any sound from what I was seeing. I stood and watched this for 15 minutes or so, being extremely intrigued. I debated whether I should go and have a closer look, but decided that discretion was the better part of valour, being very alone and about 16 years old.

Twenty-five years later I was on a business trip to Western Australia and revisited the site in daylight. I found that about where I had seen the lights was a low ridge or hill. The ground sloped gently up to the ridge from the road, and the whatever it was must have been at eye level from the road for lights on what I assume was something rotating to appear to cross each other at the centre of their motion.

I have often wondered what I saw. It could not have been a sprinkler in that location, and anyway, why would anyone put lights on it? I thought it might have been a helicopter with lights on the rotor ends – but why would it continue to rotate, even if helicopters ever have lights on their rotor blades?

Returning to the Mayanup events for a moment – the whole area is loaded with iron ore and if you run a magnet through any gravel a lot of it will stick to the magnet. So, extremely strong magnetic fields could possibly move rocks and gravel around, as well as any other items with an iron content. This is all very well of course, but leaves open the question of how such a field could arise.

IAN MACMILLAN
Mt Waverley, Victoria, Australia

MUNDANE MESSAGE

Regarding the spooky phone message recalled by Rob Dickinson [**FT139:51**]: I also remember this from my childhood and believe that it involved dialling your own number. The message on the line was not "Help me, Suzie's dying" but, as I remember, "Please hold, user is dialling." It was a bit like today's "The number you are dialling is incorrect" except that back in the 1970s the sound quality was not as good and the recording was very faint and difficult to hear. Today, if you dial your own number, you get an engaged tone, but back then this was the message.

S C PAGE
Birmingham, West Midlands

THE EYE DECEIVED

This photograph could serve as a salutary warning for saucerheads. Back in 1989/90 I was living in Bernard Castle, Co Durham. One evening at about 6pm, I was putting out the rubbish when I saw a brilliant light hovering over the church spire and town centre. There was heavy cloud cover and no wind and absolutely no sound coming from the light. After watching it with my wife for about 15 minutes, I drove into town with trepidation to investigate. It soon became clear that a TV crew had set up an evening shot involving a huge spotlight on a crane. They were making an episode of *Boon* starring Michael Elphick. Had I not ventured into town that night, I wonder what my sighting would have turned into!

MARK SPAIN
Leeds, West Yorkshire

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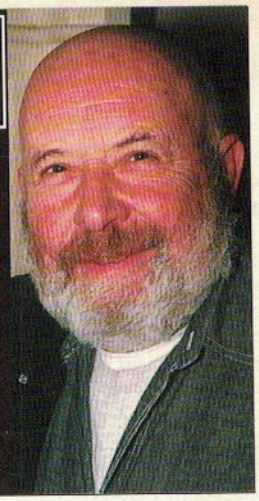

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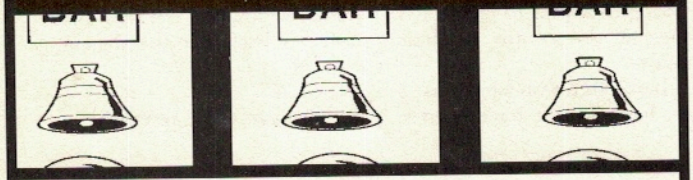

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THE DEVIL IS NOT IN THE DETAIL

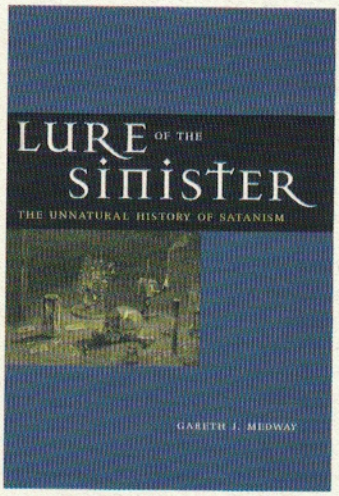
Ludicrous tales and credulous beliefs of Satanic goings-on shrivel under the spotlight

LURE OF THE SINISTER

THE UNNATURAL HISTORY OF SATANISM

GARETH J MEDWAY

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS, NEW YORK, 2001
HB, $32.95, 465PP
ISBN 0 8147 5645 X



EVERYTHING THAT IS NOT THEIR TRUTH IS SATANIC

Satanists carry out two million human sacrifices a year in the US alone, according to one supposed expert. Hold on… Has no one noticed all these people disappearing? No, because – of course – the Satanists are so clever at hiding their activities, and police chiefs and politicians "at the highest level" are in on the cover-up. Then there are all those teenage brood mothers who claim to have given birth to baby after baby for sacrifice… while living with their families who failed to notice their pregnancies. And the Kent woman who claimed her father had made her take part in Satanic rituals during which 20 men had raped her, but who was found still to be a virgin.

Some of this might almost be amusing were it not for the consequences. In America, fathers are serving consecutive multiple life sentences for satanically abusing their daughters, and nursery school teachers for satanically abusing toddlers in their care. And it's not just in America that such craziness goes on. It's only a decade since we had the moral panic of Satanic Ritual Abuse in this country: dawn raids on families in Nottingham, Rochdale, the Orkneys; parents accused of abusing their children; children taken away, interrogated, poked and prodded, and not returned to their families, sometimes for years, all on no evidence. A small group of over-zealous social workers had uncritically accepted stories made up by a few US fundamentalist Christians, who had exported their paranoia to Britain. (Anthropologist Professor Jean LaFontaine's official report in 1994 comprehensively dealt with the "myth" of Satanic Ritual Abuse.)

In *Lure of the Sinister*, Gareth Medway explores dozens of such stories. He examines their factual accuracy, if any, and he discusses where such stories spring from, and why. But he also goes deeper into stories about Satanic rituals, including black masses, tracing them back through history, and what he finds is fascinating. Every few years another lurid story is splashed over the tabloids of a woman who became involved in Satanism, took part in dark rituals, and was usually made a High Priestess straight away. Medway shows how each story is a new version of an older one – the names, dates and places changed, but everything else essentially the same, including, of course, the inverted crucifix, and also inverted candles (think about it…). And all the Satanic rituals can be traced back, step by step, to an account published in 1886, by Jean-Francois Bladé in his *Contes populaires de la Gascogne*, a collection of stories and fairy tales, the source, embroidered with each retelling, of just about every "factual" account of a black mass.

What of the young women whose stories of Satanic sexual depravity are related with such glee? Strangely, most had forgotten their terrifying experiences until their memories were jogged, either by a therapist specialising in Satanic (rather than in UFO abductions) "survivors", or by an Evangelical church specialising in casting out demons. Most people who have been abused wish that they *could* forget their experiences.

And here is one more dangerous consequence of the credulity of those who invent and apparently believe such tales: they risk making us doubt the genuine cases of abuse that do, sadly, occur. They also carelessly confuse witches and Satanists. Satanism is an inversion of Christianity; witchcraft, or Wicca, is a nature religion, part of today's neo-pagan revival. It's an important distinction, particularly to Medway, who is a priest of the Fellowship of Isis, a pagan order based in Ireland, but who is certainly not a Satanist. But for fundamentalist Evangelicals, everything that is not their own Truth is Satanic, including Freemasonry – and Catholicism.

One question Medway can't really answer, about those who spread scare stories about Satanists-amongst-us, is: "Why do some people have such a powerful urge to believe that it overwhelms their reasoning powers?" People believe what they want to believe, and people looking for evil will find evil, even if they have to ask little children leading questions. If the children say no, nothing happened, then they must be in denial; if they eventually say yes (because, as LaFontaine says, "in the course of repeated interviews children learn what it is that the adults want to hear"), then we must "believe the children". Testimony on which people are now serving life sentences includes children being taken in helicopters, submarines or jets. "They would thus arrive at 'Disneyland,' 'Sesame Street,' 'Alice in Wonderland,' 'the Wizard of Oz,' 'Santa's North Pole,' or a 'magic castle,' where they would be abused and then returned to day care." And no one passing the day care centre would notice all this activity…

"In cases [..] where children are ritually abused by outsiders," writes Medway, "they apparently have astonishingly negligent parents who, when their offspring regularly go missing for many hours and return having been drugged, tied up, raped, sodomized, flogged with bullwhips, cut with knives, smeared with blood and excrement, and other things that should have left obvious signs, fail to notice anything amiss, until a child therapist or Expert on Satanism informs them of what has been going on."

For some readers, the explicit detail in this book might be upsetting; for others, the whole subject will be disturbing. But far more disturbing than the fact that there are indeed a very few genuine Satanists (none of whom have been implicated in any abusive activity), is the mediæval-style witch-hunt in which people are judged guilty simply because they have been accused.

Medway's book is a breath of fresh air in this field of murk, delusion and deception. One hopes it will soon appear in affordable paperback, because it should be compulsory reading for clergy, for therapists, for journalists – and for those dedicated anti-Satanists who still peddle their dark fantasies around this supposedly civilised world, causing more real harm than they ever expose.

DAVID V BARRETT

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT
AN INVALUABLE ANTIDOTE TO BLIND SUPERSTITION **9**

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BOB RICKARD

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SECRET WEAPONS

HOW TWO SISTERS WERE BRAINWASHED TO KILL FOR THEIR COUNTRY

CHERYL & LYNN HERSHA, WITH DALE GRIFFIS & TED SCHWARZ

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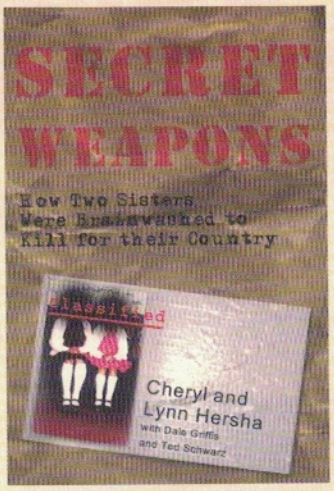

The subtitle of *Secret Weapons* – 'How Two Sisters Were Brainwashed to Kill for their Country' – is succinct. Such exotic Intelligence Agency projects, while accepted and documented – see, for example, David Guyatt's essay, 'Police State of Mind' **[FT95:34]**, or Colin Bennett's 'Manchurian Candy' **[FT148:34]** – still seem to exist in an uneasy twilight state between reality and fiction. The CIA's deliberate destruction of their MKULTRA records and the fact that so much testimony has emerged through the controversial techniques of memory-recovery gives 'survivor accounts' a decidedly insubstantial quality. This has, regrettably, led to the neglect of some of history's most credible cases of apparent mind control (such as Sirhan Sirhan's evident hypno-programming prior to the assassination of Robert Kennedy); and to a proliferation of hair-raisingly ridiculous tales, such as those peddled by 'Cathy Brice' (the alleged remote-controlled sex-slave of Bob Hope and Henry Kissinger), which so excite those of the Ickean tendency. *Secret Weapons* is, mercifully, sober and measured, while utterly astonishing.

Abducted with the 'consent by proxy' of their parents, Lynn and Cheryl Hersha (aged four and six) are put through a monstrous regimen of torture and experimentation (which, oddly, mirrors the conceit of Paul Anderson's 1998 sci-fi movie *Soldier*, starring Kurt Russell). The long-term aim of this dehumanisation is to produce adults with 'designer' Multiple Personality Disorder, who will unwittingly serve as assassins and spies – the 'Secret Weapons' of the title. All this, and the everyday pains of attending school and growing up, too. While the background to this grotesque scenario is clearly delineated (in particular, the USA's 27-year holdout against signing the Geneva protocols outlawing experimentation on children), and painstakingly researched (there are – count them – 17 documentary appendices), some details will naturally provoke incredulity. For instance, the metamorphosis of the adolescent girls into cigar-chomping male alter-egos, who are unsuspected by their platoons, seemed hugely implausible to this reviewer – until he remembered that the fortean literature is liberally strewn with instances of voluntary transvestism and adopted gender-stereotypical behaviour that have fooled even marital partners (the famous 'Colonel Barker', who "hunted and boxed and seemed 'a jolly good fellow'" springs to mind). When one considers what might therefore be achieved by deliberate mind-control methods, this aspect of the story no longer seems fanciful or absurd.

Some aspects, however, are frustratingly unclear (for example, the alleged 'implant' found in Cheryl's sinuses). Others (such as Cheryl's ordeal during the creation of her 'Sexy Sadie' alter-ego) are harrowing, such is their wealth of detail. 'Big names' are encouragingly absent: Richard Nixon is glimpsed briefly, in the background of a White House function; CIA director Richard Helms appears, and is recalled for a distinctive ring that he wore; but that's it. Overall, *Secret Weapons* has the air of truth, although we are, as ever, left uncertain.

Sometimes, the treatment seems plain barmy – at one stage, the experimentation attempted to investigate the ability to travel, in an altered state, through time, an idea that the scientists were frank had been adopted wholesale from Madeline L'Engle's creepy classic, *A Wrinkle in Time*. But, then again, we know that the CIA spent millions on remote viewing projects, wiring up cats to become roving eavesdropping devices, and poisoning Fidel Castro's diving suits: as the old adage has it, "Military intelligence is not to be confused with the everyday human variety". This reviewer was sufficiently intrigued and impressed to consider that *Secret Weapons* may deserve to rank alongside Bowart's *Operation Mind Control* and Bains's *The Control of Candy Jones* in documenting the excesses of the CIA's nasty tendency to experiment on unwitting civilians. The Cold War's 'sleep of reason' has truly bred monsters, one way or another.

GARRICK ALDER

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT
CREDIBLE-INCREDIBLE **7**

ANCIENT STRUCTURES

COMPILED BY WILLIAM CORLISS

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BOB RICKARD

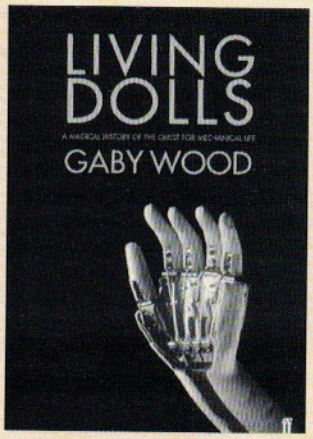
FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT
MORE ESSENTIAL READING FROM A FORTEAN HERO **9**

LIVING DOLLS

A MAGICAL HISTORY OF THE QUEST FOR MECHANICAL LIFE

GABY WOOD

FABER & FABER 2002
PB, 253PP, B&W ILLUS, £12.99
ISBN 0 571 17879 0



With a title like *Living Dolls*, this book might seize the reader with the involuntary terror caused only by the sudden appearance of Sir Cliff Richard, but thankfully it concerns altogether darker constructions of humanity. "Mechanical life" conjures images of maniacal scientists hunched over benches, of black magicians lugging flesh around by dead of night, or of tinkerers building elaborate clockwork children whose mouths clack nastily as they stare up at their creator. It takes a lot to overcome this romantic imagery, and so Wood sets herself a mighty task from the very title. Despite good intentions and undeniable skill, it is one she never really achieves. Everything within the 250 or so pages here is well written, excellently researched and entertaining, but, as with many of the creations discussed within it, the book lacks a certain spark of life.

Let me explain one thing clearly. This is not a history, whatever the subtitle claims. Wood has instead created a series of linked snapshots of history, centring upon automata, robots, toys and people who look like them. Each individual section, of which there are five, together with an excellent introduction and epilogue, is distinctive – in fact, a little too distinctive. The book feels like a collection of essays, not an organic whole. Wood forces her chapters together, sometimes a little clumsily, like the parts of Edison's crude talking doll. Edison built the doll to house his phonograph, a literal "baby" for the invention he called by that name. This talking doll is a central image for Wood (along with a wonderful shitting duck, arguably the best glimpse of Enlightenment France you will ever find), and she muscles an agenda around it, blending feminism with Freud. This mix is doomed to fail thanks to Freud's loathsome and well-known attitude to women, and it undermines otherwise interesting psychological theorising about why men (and almost exclusively men) go to such lengths to create "living" machines. Edison was a strange chap certainly, and much of Wood's theorising about the "construction of women" revolves around him: there is an uneasy balance between how much the forthright Edison was expressing the male subconscious, and how much he was an antisocial weirdo who spent too much time in his library and could sleep standing up.

The real flaw in Wood's analysis lies in her evidence: of the "automata" she chooses to discuss, many are male, or asexual (scientific automata, for example), and the most popular of all "artificial life" seems to have been the aforementioned diarrhoea-stricken waterfowl (Disney missed one there, I feel).

Nevertheless, this is a fascinating book. Wood, in focusing on five "snapshots" of automata and near-automata through the ages, has produced a curiosity on a par with her subjects. As a resource on the "quest for mechanical life", the book is as much a trick as the Chess Player whose story Wood makes so compelling. Just like that "automaton", the real interest here lies in curiosity: Wood herself plays gambits that reveal her real motives crouched inside the box, concealed beneath a layer of cunning. Her Chess Player is carved from historical apocrypha and curios from a clockwork world, and the parts are well worth admiring, whatever one thinks of the whole. I do not hesitate to recommend it, but those expecting a history of Pinnochios and Frankensteins may be disappointed.

STEVE PENN

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

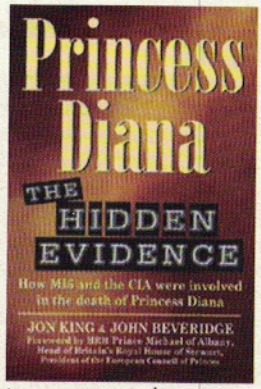
A FLAWED BUT VERY READABLE HISTORY **7**

PRINCESS DIANA

THE HIDDEN EVIDENCE

JOHN KING & JOHN BEVERIDGE

SPI BOOKS, NEW YORK, 2002
PB, XIX + 408PP, $24.95
ISBN 1 561719226


Princess Diana
THE HIDDEN EVIDENCE
How MI6 and the CIA were involved in the death of Princess Diana
JON KING & JOHN BEVERIDGE

King and Beveridge published the newsstand *UFO Reality*, perhaps the most credulous of the UK 'abduction' magazines. They were often informed by nameless or unnameable sources or, worse, non-professional hypnotic regression. I could never tell who had made up what, or decide just where they belonged on the chain of gullibility at the end of which we readers frequently find ourselves.

The theme of this book is that Princess Diana was murdered, by or on behalf of MI6 and the CIA. Most of the theories surrounding the actual death you'll have heard before: the authors simply provide extra, and odder, motives. We hear that Diana had been chosen to marry into the Royal Family because she, as a Spencer, was of the 'grail bloodline', and could improve the family as breeding stock. Divorced from Charles and intending to marry a Muslim, she simply had to die.

Plugging the 'grail bloodline' concept is the real agenda here. The dependence on *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* is obvious. The authors are totally convinced by the 'Priory of Sion' fantasies constructed around Rennes-le-Chateau and we are told – on who knows what authority (the book is devoid of both index and references) – that two of the 'Saunière Parchments' contained genealogies, and that MI6, the SOE and the CIA were "largely instrumental in their transfer from France to Britain during the 1950s."

The authors' sources are not verifiable. We meet a variety of unnamed spooks, particularly a "former British Foreign Office (MI6) historian". His job was, they say, to "sift through historical and genealogical data due for classification review", and his sources included "documents dating back to the first and second centuries AD". The authors met with him in a hotel, the meeting having been brokered by yet another unnameable. Nonetheless, they were clearly impressed by what they were told. It culminated in the revelation that "the Holy Grail is the most sought-after political artefact in the Western world. It has become the masonic watchword for the royal bloodline of David and Yeshua…" Yes, Diana was of the royal bloodline, and if the Windsors couldn't have her, then nobody else could…

Those who stand, knowingly, at the beginning of the chain of gullibility here know noticeably more about the curious theories of 'Sir' Laurence Gardner's 'Bloodline of the Holy Grail' than about mainstream, fact-based history or genealogy. The self-identified former MI6 historian presents Gardner's assertions regarding the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene as a finding of his own research. 'HRH Prince Michael of Albany', a young man from Belgium who believes he should be King of Scotland, gave Gardner a 'knighthood' among other elaborate titles entirely on his own debatable authority. The 'Prince' provides a foreword to the book, and a 25-page interview near the end. Gardner's popular but, on examination, unpersuasive mix of fringe theology, British Israelitism, interbreeding with aliens and the factualisation of myth, is treated with a respect it doesn't earn.

The book's title reflects the question that hangs over it. Was the evidence the authors present hidden until it was given to them? Or was the 'Diana' material already out there on the Internet, with only the 'bloodline' and 'Prince Michael' elements recently added, and fed to them because their track record made them a prime target for persons who wanted specific disinformation to reach a wider audience? I don't know the answer to these questions, but they could usefully be asked by any potential reader.

KEVIN MCCLURE

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT

UTTERLY FANTASTIC, IN THE ORIGINAL SENSE OF THE WORD... **2**

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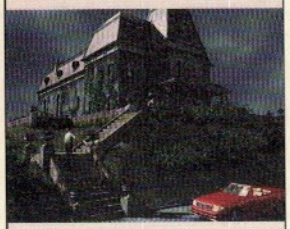

The French have always loved their Hitchcock – it was largely the efforts of *Nouvelle Vague*-ers like Truffaut and Chabrol that transformed perceptions of his films, revealing them as cinematic art rather than just accomplished thrillers.

No surprise then that French developers Arxel Tribe have produced the official Hitchcock game – an aptly convoluted tale of murder, obsession and film-making. Its strengths and weaknesses are typical of the adventure genre as a whole: time-consuming inventories, a linear (if frequently incomprehensible) storyline and maddening puzzles are all present. Where the game does score is in the detail – it's full of sly Hitchcockian references, beautiful cinematic screens and musical motifs which tip their hats to Bernard Hermann. Another major plus for Hitch fans is the inclusion of clips from his films – triggered as Frank Black style psychic flashes by key objects in the game.

DAVID SUTTON

COMPETITION

Thanks to Wanadoo, we have five copies of *Hitchcock: The Final Cut* to give away to readers who can answer the following question:

IN WHICH OF HITCHCOCK'S MOVIES DOES HE MAKE HIS CAMEO APPEARANCE RIDING ON THE LONDON UNDERGROUND ?

Answers on a postcard to: 'FT156 Hitchcock competition', FREEPOST (SWB 1446), Patchway, Bristol, BS32 0ZZ, or by email to: forteantimes@cisubs.co.uk with 'FT Hitchcock Comp' as the subject line by 20 March 2002.

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES

USA, 2002

DIR: MARK PELLINGTON; WR: RICHARD HATEM (BASED ON THE BOOK BY JOHN KEEL)
UK RELEASE DATE 1 MARCH 2002

Anyone reading John Keel's wonderfully vivid and engaging book over the past 25 years or so is likely to have imagined what a great film it could have made, and now it's finally here. But it may just be eight years too late, coming long after TV's *The X-Files* has mined Keel's haunted planet to the point of exhaustion. On the plus side, however, this has freed director Pellington and writer Hatem to create a distinctly mature, *post-X-Files* film that at times feels awkwardly self-conscious in its attempts to distinguish itself from its spiritual predecessor. Stylistically and thematically, it remains unable to extricate itself entirely from the series' shadow.

The film takes its central ideas from the book – referred to as a "novel" in the opening credits, while declaring that what we are watching is "based on true events" – but dispenses with many of its iconic elements. Those of you hoping to see the *Men in Black* rehabilitated after their last big screen outing are in for a major disappointment (so no jelly fondling in the café), nor is the strangely odorous Princess Moon Owl anywhere to be seen. In fact much of the book's humour and more surreal aspects have been removed, as if to remind us that this is a grown-up film. Or perhaps real life is just too strange for Hollywood?

Story-wise what we have left is a series of increasingly bizarre communications with a presence known as Indrid Cold that ultimately lead Klein to paranormal researcher Alexander Leek (geddit?), played by a cranky Alan Bates. Leek has been here before. In fact, he got so close to the truth that he almost lost his mind. Can Klein handle it? And what of Cold's predictions of impending disaster?

The film's strength lies in its glimpse of an unsettling and genuinely fortean world beyond ours. "They're a condition of the planet," surmises Leek, but "we're not allowed to know." And sometimes the boundaries between our two worlds dissolve, in which case, beware: "You noticed them, and they noticed that you noticed them."

Unfortunately the film does suffer from some serious problems, particularly in its pacing. Director Pellington lets things unravel at a snail's pace, but this never picks up, and at two hours, it's definitely a half hour too long, so that the supposed climax feels more like an afterthought. There's also a coldness to the film which, while perhaps appropriate to the subject matter, means it never really draws us deeply into its universe.

The Mothman Prophecies may not be entirely satisfactory as an adaptation of Keel's book. It is, however, a bold and interesting attempt to tackle complex subject matter with a seriousness that most paranormal experiencers could only dream of receiving from the media. See the film, and then, if you haven't already done so, read the book to see what you missed.

MARK PILKINGTON

SCI•FI HEADF**K

ADVERTISEMENT BY Sci-Fi

HEADFK** returns every Thursday night from 7 February at the new time of 11.45pm. It's as deranged as ever, but this time it's condensed into a one-hour format. Shorter, snappier and, quite frankly, even more f**ked up, it's set to befuddle the post-pub brain with superbly bizarre short films, twisted animations and unhinged music videos.

HEADFK** has to be seen to be believed and is the perfect late night televisual antidote to the boredom that usually follows pub/club closing time. Below is a taster of the type of programming you can expect to see late night every Thursday. **HEADF**K** is very far removed from traditional scheduling, so remember that the programmes mentioned may not appear in their entirety. Instead elements will be blended and mixed to add to the bizarre, surreal and trippy feel...

THE BIG SHAVE
Scorsese short about a man who continually cuts himself shaving until he is covered in blood.

DESSERTS
Ewan McGregor is dragged out to sea by a chocolate eclair attached to a fishing line!

ALICE IN PLASMALAND
Perverted plasticine capers.

HEADWRECKER
A stressed employee's head explodes as a result of an annoying boss.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Bizarre animated horror story about an evil little boy.

MANLY GAMES
Animated footballers are killed in a series of bizarre ways whilst cheesy '70s music tinkles in the background.

DARKNESS, LIGHT, DARKNESS

Animated short about a head that makes its own body, from Czech surrealist Jan Svankmajer.

During this weekly dose of mind-messing Sci•Fi will seek solace in the cheery tunes of such fellow freaksters as RADIOHEAD, SQUAREPUSHER, BJÖRK and MARILYN MANSON as we delve into the videos of an eclectic range of artists and madmen.

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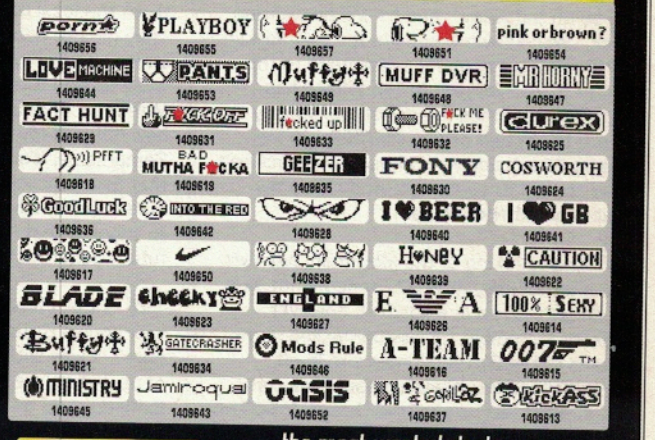

mobee chart

1409658	PPK - Ressurection
1409659	Pharoahe Monch - Get You
1409660	Afroman - Because I Got High
1409661	Britney Spears - I'm A Slave 4 U
1409662	Destiny's Child - Bootylicious
1409663	D12 & Eminem - Purple Hills
1409664	DPM - Heaven is a Half Pipe
1409665	Roger Sanchez - Another Chance
1409666	Pink, Mya & ... - Lady Marmalade
1409667	Sisqo - Dance with Me
1409668	Blink 182 - all the small things
1409669	Limp Bizkit - rearranged
1409670	Wheatus - A little Respect
1409671	Geri Halliwell - It's Raining Men
1409672	S Club 7 - Don't Stop Moving
1409673	Gorillaz - Clint Eastwood
1409674	Atomic Kitten - Whole Again
1409675	U2 - Beautiful Day

the most wanted ringtones

rap/hip hop

1409676	Dr Dre - Forget About Dre
1409677	MOP - Cold as Ice
1409678	Wyclef Jean - Perfect Gentleman
1409679	Dr Dre - The Next Episode
1409680	Tupac - California Love
1409681	Eminem - Still Don't Give a F*ck
1409682	DMX - Party up
1409683	DMX - It's All Good

films/tv

1409692	Rocky Theme
1409693	Charlies Angels Theme
1409694	James Bond Theme
1409695	Mission Impossible Theme
1409696	Austin Powers Theme
1409697	A Team Theme
1409698	South Park Theme
1409699	Lock Stock & Two... Theme

r & b

1409684	Backtrash - No Diggity
1409685	Christina Aguilera - Genie In A ...
1409686	Nelly - Ride Wit' Me
1409687	Shaggy - Angel
1409688	Sisqo - Thong Song
1409689	TLC - Waterfalls
1409690	Warren G - Regulate
1409691	Will Smith - Will2K

classics

1409700	The Verve - Bitter Sweet Symphony
1409701	Ocean Colour Scene - The Circle
1409702	Simple Minds - Don't You Forget ...
1409703	Guns & Roses - Sweet Child of Mine
1409704	Red Hot Chili Peppers - Scar Tissue
1409705	Tears For Fears - Shout
1409706	Eurythmics - Sweet Dreams
1409707	The Clash - Rock The Casbah

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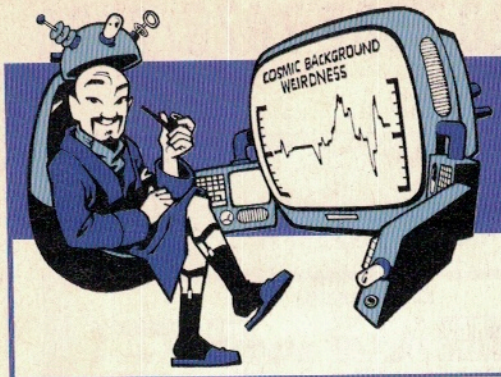

HIEROPHANT

IN HIS FORTRESS OF ARROGANCE, DEEP BELOW THE HIMALAYAS, THE IMMORTAL ASCENDED MASTER KNOWN AS THE HIEROPHANT TRAVELS THE MORE DISREPUTABLE PATHS OF FORTEANA...

Many forteans around the world were shocked to read the news: just as his most famous work, *The Mothman Prophecies*, was reaching the cinemas in the USA, **John Keel** had died. *FT* regular **Loren Coleman** got the sad news direct from "a prominent individual in the radio and UFO field" (nudge, nudge) in mid-January. Now, Coleman believes that he spoke to Keel on the phone later that evening, but given the nature of the telephonic hi-jinx that litter *The Mothman Prophecies*, the Hierophant remains sceptical. Indeed, it appears that Keel was likewise unconvinced. According to Coleman, he asked him to "tell everyone that the funeral will be on Saturday – and he will be wearing black." Well-known figures in the paranormal world seem particularly susceptible to this sort of thing – **Robert Anton Wilson** has 'died' several times (most notably shortly before the actual death of writing partner **Robert Shea**), and Keel himself was declared dead around 10 years ago. And I have my doubts about **Nick Pope**.

And speaking of the Mothman, have we found his identity at last? Probably not, but we do at least have a suspect, however unlikely. Incredibly, he was unmasked in the forums of the Fortean Times site itself, specifically **http://www.forteantimes.com/forum/showthread.php?s=&threadid=502&highlight=beckjord**

And who was this impossibly enigmatic figure? Why, it was **Erik Beckjord**! Who else? "Mothman and Owlman and Batsquatch are temporary physical forms for human minds on an OOBE," writes the former proprietor of the World's Largest Blob Of Chewing Gum Museum. "In 1966, I was living in Washington DC, not too far from Point Pleasant, WVA, and I had a vivid dream that I was flying, and over a road, looking at people, trying to tell them the local bridge was about to fall in... They did not hear me, but they saw me. I guess I had wings, since I was flying. Then I woke up and found the cat licking my face. Mothman, of course, disappeared. This somehow got into my pal John Keel's book..." Remarkable. It's becoming increasingly clear that Erik is possibly the most important human being alive today; I'm almost moved to suggest that he be preserved in resin for future generations. Soon. Please.

Time, I feel, for a quick quiz. Which well-known British ufologist is speaking here? "I was with a skinhead group, about 15 of us, [when] we saw the [Anti-Nazi League] leafleters. As we approached them there was a skip full of bricks and bottles and we armed ourselves. They didn't know we were going to hit them until the last minute... We trailed them at a discreet distance, but once they were on the estate, we ran at them. There was no shouting or threats; a whole gang of Nazi skins just poured down on the Anti-Nazi League, who were nearly all youngsters, including women. The wave of skinheads just poured over them... One anti-fascist youngster had a camera and attempted to photograph the attack. He was stabbed in the arm with a broken bottle. The mood in the pub afterwards was [...] like Christmas come early." No, you big sillies, it's not Jenny Randles. Step forward, **Tim Matthews**, speaking in the days when he was called **Tim Hepple**. The quote comes from Nick Lowles' excellent *White Riot* (Milo Books 2001, ISBN 1 903845 00 8), a history of the violent neo-Nazi group Combat 18. Matthews has of course since renounced his violent past and extremist beliefs, and has even provided intelligence on the BNP for World In Action and the deeply anti-fascist *Searchlight* magazine. Sensible lad.

In these difficult times, the Hierophant is more than happy to help America's public servants in any way he can. So I pass on this important message from Notary Public **Ms SD Roberts** of Florida: "It seems that many historic events have been subjected with the presence of UFOs and from the picture depicted in *Fortean Times* Dec 2001 issue, it appears that this terrorist attack is no exception. This terrorist attack impacted the entire world and it would only seem likely that other worldly entities would be concerned and want to observe the outcome of this attack. Also in your magazine you have depicted the complexity of recent crop circles. Now with the binary code and face crop markings, the time of full contact seems to be getting near." That will be all.

If you have a lead on any paranormal gossip, share it with the Hierophant.... hierophant@ifgmags.com

KIERON DWYER

NEXT MONTH IN FT

MAGIC AND MEDICINE
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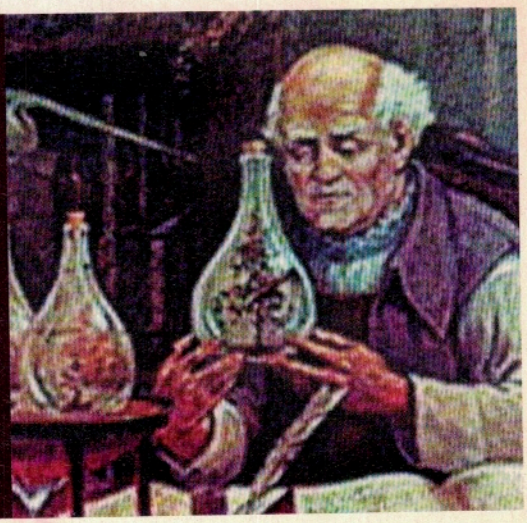
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